

The Jngle Book Series

THE INDIAN STORY BOOK



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THE INDIAN STORY BOOK

CONTAINING TALES FROM THE *RĀMĀYANA*,
THE *MAHĀBHĀRATA*, AND OTHER
EARLY SOURCES

RETOLD BY
RICHARD WILSON

WITH SIXTEEN COLOURED PLATES AND
LINE ILLUSTRATIONS FROM DRAWINGS BY
FRANK C. PAPÉ

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PREFACE

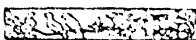
THE stories of this book are, for the most part, drawn from the two great Indian epics, the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata*. I have tried to tell them simply, and to this end have rigidly kept down the number of proper names, as experience tells me that the popularity of Hawthorne's stories from the Greek Classics is largely due to this characteristic. It is also out of consideration for the youth of my readers that I have omitted accents which mean less than nothing to most of them, and have simplified the proper names as much as possible. This is all part of my plan for showing that these Oriental stories have within them the same elements as those which win our admiration in the tales of our own land—love of virtue and hatred of oppression, tenderness towards children, women, and the aged, bravery and resource in the face of danger, patience under tribulation, and faith in the ultimate conquest of evil.

Readers of Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*

will recognise the source of the story to which I have given the title of *The Prince Wonderful*. I hope that I have in some small measure brought out the wonderful spiritual meaning of that poem so far as it can be apprehended by the readers for whom this volume is intended. I am indebted to Miss F. Richardson's *The Iliad of the East* (1870) for the outline of the story which I have named *The Great Drought*, and for other help in telling the story of Rama. Other books from which I have drawn material are Sir Edwin Arnold's *Indian Idylls*, Mr. R. C. Dutt's translation into English verse of selected portions of the *Mahābhārata*, and Professor J. Campbell Oman's summaries of the two great epics. The story of Sakuntala is told from the English prose translation of that drama of Kalidasa, the "Shakespeare of India," by Charles Wilkins, published at the request of Warren Hastings in 1785.

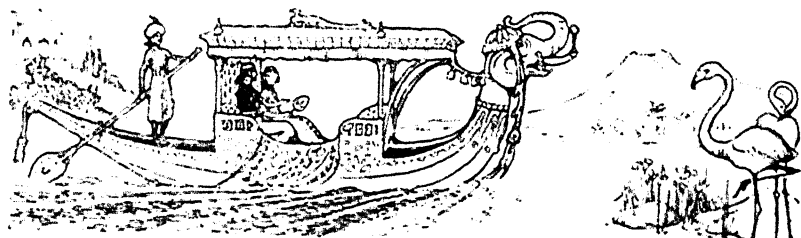
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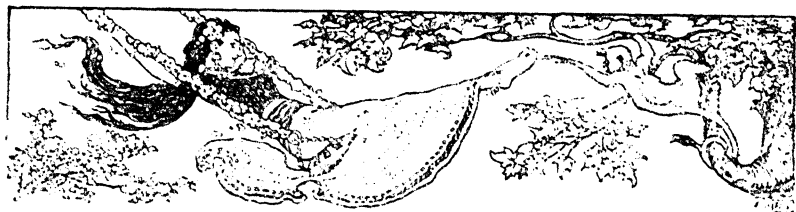




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THIS BOOK

IS

Dedicated

TO THAT SPIRIT OF KINSHIP AND UNDERSTANDING

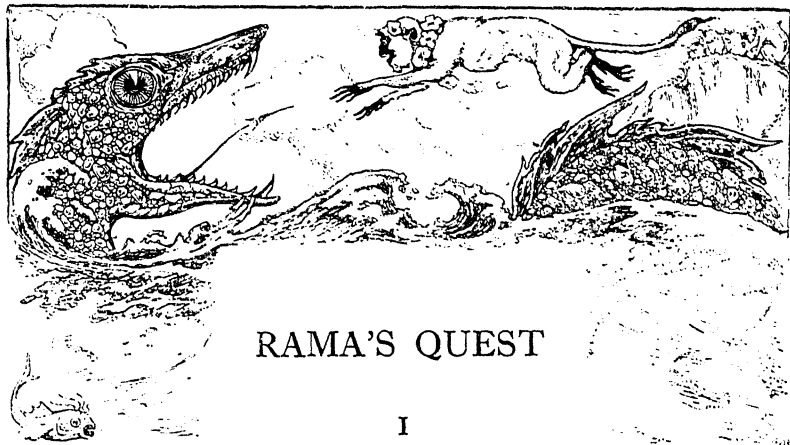
WHICH UNITES THE HEARTS OF THE BEST IN INDIA

WITH THE HEARTS OF THE BEST IN BRITAIN

STORY I

RAMA'S QUEST

A Tale of Sita and “The Friend of Living Creatures”



RAMA'S QUEST

I

LIFE was indeed fair and beautiful in the city of Ayodhya, which was of matchless situation and shone resplendent with burnished gold; and all its people were good and beautiful, rich and happy. The streets of the city were broad and open, lined with elegant shops and lordly houses flashing in the sunlight with gems of unknown value. Food and water were plentiful, the sweetest music resounded on all sides, and the city was famous throughout the land for its holy men. The workmen rejoiced in the skill of their hands, the soldiers held the honour of Ayodhya dearer than life itself, while over all ruled King Dasaratha, full of virtue, wisdom, and valour.

But there was one deep shadow in this city of sunshine. The king had no son to succeed him.

One day he consulted the priests, who told him that the sacrifice of a horse would win for him the favour of the gods; and without delay preparations were made for the ceremony, which was conducted with the greatest care, with the result that the noble

king, to his unbounded joy, was promised the reward, not of one son, but four !

In due time four sons were born to King Dasara, and the name given to the first was Rama, who grew up to become a youth of more than ordinary strength, skill, bravery, and beauty. One day he met a holy man who told him that at the time of his birth the gods had created a very large number of Bears and Monkeys who would one day be useful to him in the work which he was destined to do.

On another day a priest came to him and told him that his friends, who formed a community of hermits, were greatly troubled by a band of demons, and that they would be glad of his help against their dreadful foes. At first the king was unwilling to let the boy go on such a dangerous expedition, but after a while he was persuaded to give his consent, and Rama set out at once in the company of his brother Lakshmana and a friend who had magic powers.

The land through which the travellers journeyed was thinly peopled and for the most part covered with forests in which there were many hermitages ; and before they had covered much ground Rama was asked to challenge a dreadful ogress named Tarika who lived in the dark recesses of a wood.

Rama twanged his huge bow in the hearing of the monster, who was greatly enraged at the sound and at once showed fight. Her method of attack was to raise a blinding, choking dust round about her opponent and under cover of this to shower down heavy stones upon him. The brothers were.

however, so skilful with their bows that they intercepted these stones in mid-air with their arrows while at the same time they shot away the hands, nose, and ears of the ogress. Then she changed her shape again and again, baffling the efforts of the brothers for a time, but at last they found her in the shape of a serpent and laid her dead at their feet. Then they went on their way again rejoicing, with the praises of the hermits singing in their ears.

This was not the only combat in which the brothers and the magician engaged during their journey through the forest-lands ; but in each fight they were successful chiefly because they lived sparingly, exercised constantly, took great interest in the history of the places which they passed, and performed their religious duties with great care and unfailing regularity. Thus, living a healthy life in the open air, they were able to meet with confidence of victory any danger which arose.

At last the wanderers came to the kingdom of King Mithila, who had a lovely daughter named Sita, of whom many wonderful tales were told, none more strange than that of the manner of her birth. For it was told, when the king was ploughing the ground at a festival the beautiful princess had sprung, full grown, radiant and smiling, from a furrow which the monarch had turned. Further, it was said that Sita would become the bride of any warrior who could bend the huge and ponderous bow which the king kept in his armoury and which had belonged to no less a personage than the great god Siva. Rama and

his companions soon heard these stories and naturally were very curious to see both the princess and the bow ; and as soon as the introduction to the king had been effected by the magician, Rama asked for the privilege of trying his strength on the wonderful weapon.

So it was brought from the armoury on a cart with eight wheels drawn along by a great company of stalwart men. Rama raised it in his hands, bent it and broke it, to the accompaniment of such a deafening sound that the whole company rolled head over heels in consternation and astonishment, all of course except the magician and the royal company, who were much too dignified for such an expression of wonder.

The king could not deny his beautiful daughter to such a hero, if indeed he had wished to do so, which he did not. Arrangements were therefore made for the wedding festival, and brides were also found for the three brothers of Rama, who had been sent for post-haste as soon as the prince had proved his strength with the bow. After the marriage, which was conducted with equal solemnity and rejoicing, the brothers returned to Ayodhya and the magician took his way alone to the mountains to spend his time in prayer, fasting, and contemplation.

II

The years went by swiftly enough, for Rama was happy in his wife and his friends. Then came a

time of woe and trouble due to the jealousy of an angry woman. The king was growing old and wished to hand over the cares of government to Rama. Indeed he began to make preparations for doing so when he was arrested by the anger of one of his wives, the mother of Prince Bharata, who himself had no desire to live in enmity with his beloved brother Rama, the idol of the city.

The king endeavoured to appease the jealousy of the offended queen, but she demanded that Rama should be banished to the forests for a period of fourteen years while her own son Bharata should be made ruler in place of his father. The old king was so much under her influence that he was forced to consent, and then to his further grief he was told that Rama, with true greatness of soul, had undertaken to go into voluntary exile in order that the peace of the happy city might be preserved.

The people of Ayodhya were filled with grief when they heard the news, but they were powerless in the matter, and Rama made his preparations without further delay. He tried to persuade his wife to remain behind, but with a gentle smile she asked proudly :

“What are the terrors of the forest to me, what are the privations of exile, so long as we are together ?”

And when she saw that Rama was unwilling to place such a burden upon her, she burst into tears, threw herself into his arms, and finally persuaded her husband to let her share his exile. Then the laughing Lakshmana too came forward and offered to go

with them. His offer was accepted, and the three made ready to leave the city in which they had enjoyed such happiness.

Their dignity and devotion did not make the slightest appeal to the heart of the jealous queen, who herself brought to them the suits of bark which they were to wear in the forest. The two princes put on their new dress without remark, but Sita was unwilling to exchange her bright silks for such a rough and uncomfortable costume; and after a time it was arranged that she should wear the coat of bark over her silken raiment. Then the three exiles took tender leave of the broken-hearted king, and made respectful obeisance to the jealous queen, while Rama told her that not she but the will of the gods sent them forth as exiles from his father's house, and that in due time the wise purpose of heaven would be clear to the eyes of all.

The king, as a final favour, ordered that the exiles should be conveyed from the city in a royal chariot, and before long they were on their way, taking with them only their arms and armour, a husbandman's hoe, and a basket bound in hide. Such was the grief of the people at their departure that the dust raised by the wheels of the chariot was laid by their copious tears. •

III

After a long journey they came to the borders of the great forest through which the sacred Ganges

flows, where they dismissed the charioteer, giving him many tender messages to their friends in the royal city.

They now began the life of the forest hermit and did not seek to relieve themselves of any of its hardships. Dressed in their coats of bark, they made their way to the bank of the river, where they happened to find a boat, which they entered. They crossed the broad stream and plunged into the depths of the dark forest, walking always in single file with Sita in the middle.

A little later they came to another stream, which they crossed on a raft made by themselves of the trunks of saplings, and, choosing a pleasant spot on the side of a wooded hill, they built a humble cottage of wood and thatched it with leaves. Here they settled down to the hermit's life, living on the game in which the forest abounded and the fruits which grew in great profusion near their dwelling.

Meanwhile in far-away Ayodhya events of great importance were taking place. The exile of Rama preyed so much upon the mind of the old king that he died and his son Bharata was called to the throne. Now this great-hearted prince had been absent from home for a long time, and when he returned he was filled with grief and wrath at the banishment of Rama, and he bitterly reproached his mother for her cruel jealousy. He refused to become king, and, after burying his father with careful attention to all the necessary rites and due observance of historic customs, he made preparations for a journey to the

forest, where he hoped to find his brother and bring him back in triumph to rule in his father's place. A great company of princes, courtiers, nobles, and people of the city prepared to set out with him, and before long they were on their way through the forest, and, directed by a hermit whom they met, they crossed the two broad rivers and passed on to the wooded hill on the side of which the royal exile had made his humble home.

After a long journey they found the prince sitting in his cottage, his hair long and matted like a hermit's, dressed in the black skin of the deer and a well-worn garment of bark. Bharata greeted him with lowly reverence and told him of the death of his father, which so affected the prince that he fell down in a swoon and was with difficulty revived by Sita and his brothers.

Then Bharata seated himself before Rama and begged him with tears in his eyes to come back to Ayodhya and take his rightful place as king of the city. Rama refused to do this, preferring to spend in exile the full term of years appointed by his father.

"Give me, then," said Bharata, "the gold-worked sandals from your feet. I will carry them back to Ayodhya as a token that I am your viceroy, and I will rule in your name until the years of exile are ended." So the prince returned with his friends to the city and undertook the work of government in the name and under the authority of Rama.

The years passed on, but the exiles did not remain in the same pleasant spot; they left their cottage

after a while and wandered onward from hermitage to hermitage. In one of these retreats they found an old man and his wife who had won great magic powers by their severity of life, and the old woman welcomed the beautiful Sita with open arms. The two women spent several days in quiet conversation, and when the travellers were preparing to go on their way the elder said to the younger, "See, little one, I have a present for you. Let me dress you and adorn you in a manner suitable to your rank." Then she brought out a beautiful dress of silk with costly ornaments and a garland of lovely flowers; and she took great delight in dressing and adorning the beautiful young princess, standing away from her to admire the effect of her loving handiwork.

On went the travellers, greatly comforted and refreshed. Now as they passed from place to place Rama heard many stories of the evil deeds of the monsters known as the Rakshasas, who were the inveterate foes of gods and men and especially of holy hermits; and many were the appeals to Rama to free the forest from these dreadful beings.

One day the exiles came upon one of these monsters, whose terrible ugliness defies description, and who was holding spellbound with a single spear a great crowd of wild animals of the forest. When he saw the beautiful princess he at once snatched her up in his arms and turned to carry her off. But in a moment Rama's bow was busy though his task was rendered difficult owing to the necessity for avoiding those parts of the monster's body which

were protected by the form of his beloved wife. So well, however, did he and his brother ply their bows, that the Rakshasa dropped the princess, seized both his foes, placed them across his broad shoulders, and turned towards a forest path which led into a gloomy recess. Then the air was rent with the piercing cries of Sita, which had such a stirring effect upon the brothers that with a mighty effort they broke from the monster's grasp and attacked him with their fists. There was a fierce encounter which ended in the death of the grisly foe, and the heroes having rested for a while went on their way rejoicing.

IV

At the next hermitage on their way the exiles were granted a vision which filled them with strength and contentment ; for they saw the chief of the gods seated in a shining chariot drawn by green horses and protected from the rays of the sun by a broad canopy supported by maidens of surpassing beauty. As soon as the three travellers appeared the splendid vision vanished, and the hermit who had been so favoured came from his cell. He was a very old man, and his eyes seemed to be looking far away into space. Rama spoke to him, but without a word in reply he sprang into a fire which had been kindled before his hut. In a few moments the hermit's worn and wasted body disappeared, and he stood up in the form of a young man of glorious beauty and

godlike strength. Then, mounting upwards as if borne by unseen hands, he disappeared in the clouds and left the exiles wondering.

Now the encounter with the Rakshasa had filled the heart of Sita with tender fears for her husband's safety, and she lovingly tried to persuade him to avoid any further contests with these fierce and relentless foes. "It is your fearless bearing and the fearful appearance of your mighty bow," she said, "which provokes these dreadful creatures. Let me tell you a tale which proves the truth of my words.

"Many years ago there lived in the woods a hermit who was so severe upon himself that even the chief of the gods schemed to frustrate him. So he took the form of a warrior and visited the saint in his cell, leaving with him, on his departure, his sword in sacred trust. The hermit was so careful to guard the treasure that he carried it with him wherever he went, and its possession made him so warlike and quarrelsome that he forsook the saintly life and fell a victim to his foes."

Rama smiled as he listened to the artless story, and gently told the princess that it was his bounden duty to act as guardian to the peaceful hermits of the forest, and that he meant to use his warlike weapon until the place was entirely freed from the Rakshasas.

So the years went by in combat and rest, effort and refreshment, facing of danger and winning of victory. At one time Lakshmana built a large clay hut propped on pillars and provided with a real floor

of wood, in which they lived happily for some time, until a certain giantess, enraged at the beauty of Sita, plotted against their peace and made an attempt to kill the princess. She was, however, prevented by Lakshmana, who cut off her nose, whereupon she went away in a great rage to prevail upon her brothers to avenge her loss upon the princely wanderers.

Then Rama went out alone with his bow in his hand and was met by a great shower of arrows, rocks, and trees, clubs, darts, and loops of rope which threatened to catch him by the neck and make him captive like a slave. With wonderful speed, strength, and skill he plied his bow, and the air grew dark with the shade cast by his arrows until at last the giants yielded, but their leader continued the fight unaided. He hurled his ponderous mace at Rama, who cut it in two with his arrows as it sped through the air. The giant uprooted a tall tree, but as it came rushing through the air it was cut in pieces by the arrows from that wonderful bow. Then an arrow like a flash of lightning sped through the air and the giant leader fell dead upon the earth ; and as he fell Rama heard above him a peal of drums which spoke of victory, and saw descending through the air a shower of roses, lilies, and lotus flowers which fell gently upon his head and shoulders.

V

Now one of the giants had left the field of battle and made his way to the court of Ravana, the king of



She was filled with wondering admiration

the giants, where he told of the fate which had befallen that monarch's army at the hands of the mighty Rama. As he spoke the giantess also came to tell of the wrong she had suffered at the hands of Lakshmana, and the terrible Ravana swore to take the most dire vengeance upon the three wanderers, and that without loss of time.

Now when Ravana had come to this decision, he rested upon it for a while and did not appear to be exceedingly eager to place himself in the way of the two brave brothers; but his sister, who had lost her nose, told him that the best possible way of revenging himself upon Rama was to carry off his beautiful and devoted wife. The king of the giants thereupon roused himself and began to think the matter out; and when he *did* begin with a plot he was an adept at making it successful.

He called to him a Rakshasa named Maricha, and by his magic power transformed him into a beautiful golden deer which had its sides spotted with silver and horns set with jewels. He then told the animal to present itself before Sita, who, when she saw it, was filled with wondering admiration and begged Rama to go after it and capture it.

Rama consented to do so, but stipulated that his brother was to remain in charge of Sita and on no account to allow her to go out of his sight. After a short chase he shot the deer in the breast and with its last breath it called out in a plaintive voice, "Ah, Sita! Ah, Lakshmana!" cleverly reproducing the tones of Rama himself. The words reached the ears

of Sita, as they were intended to do, and she implored Lakshmana to go at once to the help of her lord. At first he refused, but when the princess began to reproach him with cowardice he had no choice but to set out on the errand.

Sita placed herself at the door of her cottage to await the return of the brothers, and as she sat there a poor priest approached her begging for hospitality. She rose and gave him water to wash his feet as well as food of the best the cottage contained, but while she did so her eyes were fixed upon the forest, looking eagerly for her absent lord. She seemed, indeed, to be lost in anxious contemplation, but was suddenly aroused from her reverie in a terrifying manner, for her guest assumed the form of the monster Ravana with his ten heads and twenty arms, and in a moment Sita was being carried rapidly through the air in the golden car of the king of the giants. As the chariot sped onward the poor princess raised loud cries of distress which were heard only by the vulture-king, who came at once to the rescue. There was a fierce fight, ending in the infliction of a mortal wound upon the noble bird, which fell to the ground, and Ravana went on his way over mountains, rivers, lakes, and seas until he came at last to Lanka, his royal city, where Sita was safely housed.

Meanwhile Rama had returned to his cottage with Lakshmana, and so great was his grief at the loss of his wife that his brother found it necessary to remind him of the necessity for preserving his dignity. This reminder had the effect of calming Rama, who

now began to think out a plan for the recovery of Sita. At first he roamed aimlessly about in the neighbourhood of his cottage hoping to find the lost one quite near to his home, and trying to persuade himself that she had only wandered away for a short distance on her own accord. But he came upon the dying vulture and learnt the truth from him ; and now he knew that he had before him a task which would test all his powers to the uttermost. The loss of his wife, however, had only served to rouse him to superhuman efforts, and after the first spasms of bitter grief had spent themselves he felt able to cope with the strongest powers of evil in order to win his loved one back again ; and he found, in time, a strange ally in working out his task.

As he was making his way through the woods he came upon the Monkey King, whose name was Sugriva and who had a very melancholy disposition indeed. He took no pleasure in the blossoming trees or the song of birds ; flowers to him were mere frivolity ; and he only loved the streams because they seemed to him to sing a song which never varied in its mournfulness, and because they were convenient receptacles for the floods of tears which he shed day after day. His immediate attendants were Nala, Nila, Tara, and Hanuman, Son of the Wind.

When these intelligent animals saw Rama and his brother and noted the bows in their hands, they took to flight, hid themselves in a dark grove, and seated themselves in a circle with their chins upon their knees to consider what was next to be done.

"We have made a mistake to run away," said the Son of the Wind, "for these mortals may be of use to us."

"Men are treacherous and malicious," said Sugriva, dropping a few tears, "and we cannot be sure that these two warriors have not been sent here by Bali, the usurping King of the Monkeys, to whom all my woes are due."

Then the Son of the Wind begged for permission to approach the strangers, and, having obtained it, donned a hermit's cloak and went to meet the brothers.

"Who are you, heroes, whose limbs are like young fir trees?" he asked courteously. "If your errand be as worthy as your bearing is gallant, let me be your guide through this wood."

Lakshmana smiled to see a monkey in the dress of a hermit, and made himself and his brother known to the Son of the Wind, telling him that a hermit had recommended them to seek the help of Sugriva, the King of the Monkeys, in the search for Sita.

Hanuman cast aside his cloak. "Sugriva is my sovereign," he said. "Mount upon my back and I will bring you to him with the speed of the Wind, whose son am I." The heroes at once took advantage of this intelligence, and in a few moments were shaking hands with Sugriva, who was greatly pleased with the sad countenance of Rama, and shed streams of sympathetic tears when he heard of his woes. "I saw your beloved carried off," he said, "clasped

closely in the arms of Ravana"—here he shed more tears as if he revelled in the anguish which such a remembrance would bring to the heart of Rama, then he went on: "She screamed to me but was too far off to be heard; but as she was borne still higher into the air a tiny golden circlet dropped from her ankle and fell at my feet, followed by a scarf of pale soft azure. Then I wept so sorely that the river overflowed its banks. I have this scarf and anklet of gold in my cavern and I will fetch them to you."

He did so, and Rama found it difficult to preserve his dignity at the sight of them; and while he was looking steadfastly at them Sugriva said, "I too am in misfortune similar to your own. Let us help each other."

VI

The hero smiled at the words, but was too courteous to wound the feelings of the intelligent creature and begged him to explain himself. So the King of the Monkeys sat down with his chin on his knees and told the listening brothers how he was the victim of the cruel plots of the usurper Bali, who had driven him from his monkey throne. "And there is none on earth," he concluded, "who is able to subdue the usurper."

Lakshmana laughed loudly. "Why," he said, "Rama, King of Men, could hold his own in any circumstances and conquer anything!"

"I doubt," said the melancholy Sugriva, "whether

he could cope with Bali. Why, one day he clove with one single arrow the hearts of three palm trees."

"That is child's play," said Rama, and at once sent an arrow from his bow which clove seven trees and then stuck into a hard rock in the side of a mountain.

"O Elephant among Men!" cried Sugriva, surprised out of his melancholy into admiration, "come with me and in the strength of your presence I will defy Bali and all his monkeys." So the two set out, Sugriva defied Bali, fought with him, was beaten once, but fought again, and, finally, with the help of his new friend, brought the usurper to his death. So was Sugriva restored to his kingdom and was now ready to place his army of Monkeys and Bears at the disposal of Rama in order that they might begin in the forest the search for Sita, which they were better able to undertake than the cleverest mortals, to whom forest-craft is an accomplishment only acquired after much practice. You may remember how the gods had created this great army of Monkeys and Bears at the birth of Rama, and their purpose was now to be made clear; for the intelligent animals were marshalled under Hanuman and told that they were to search in all possible places for the lovely Sita and to return in a month to make their report.

Now their vigorous search was of no avail; and as they were under penalty of death at the hands of Sugriva if they were not successful, the leaders

agreed to put an end to their own lives, for their intelligence was only equalled by their melancholy outlook. The ancient vulture whose name was Sampati overheard them express their determination, and his fiery eyes gleamed with fierce pleasure at the thought of the feast before him. "Beyond a doubt," he said in a tone which the Monkey leaders clearly overheard, "it is truly pious to put an end to one's life when the purpose of existence has failed."

This pious speech did not greatly please the monkey generals, for it is one thing to express a determination to die, and quite another matter to find that some one will be greatly pleased at one's death. So the leaders paused for a while to engage in conversation with the hungry vulture and learnt from him that not long before Ravana had passed that way bearing the lovely Sita in his arms.

"Which direction did the monster take?" inquired the generals with great eagerness.

"A hundred miles from here," said the ancient vulture, "is the sea that washes all the southern coast, and a hundred miles from the shore is the Isle of Lanka, where Ravana dwells; thither, beyond a doubt, he has carried the beautiful Sita."

When he had given these directions the ancient vulture seemed to be renewed in strength, and without waiting for the suicide of the Monkey generals spread his wings and flew away. Then the leaders rose up refreshed and vigorous and put their army in motion towards the sea. After a long

and somewhat painful march they came to the shore and found the moaning of the breakers quite in keeping with the melancholy of their hearts.

They rested for the night, and next day considered the problem of transport across the moaning waters—a matter of sufficient difficulty to test all the intelligence they possessed. The generals ranged themselves in a line along the shore, leant their heads to the right and looked at the sea, and then leant their heads to the left and looked at it again; afterwards they all looked at each other and none spoke a word for a long time.

Then Hanuman, the Son of the Wind, rose to the occasion like a true leader. “Will you trust this matter to me?” he cried. “We will!” cried the leaders in reply. “We will!” echoed the whole army till the earth shook and the mountains shouted back. Then they wound a garland of scarlet flowers round the neck of their leader and led him to the top of a high mountain that he might leap from thence right across the water to the Isle of Lanka, for this was his daring plan.

In a moment his mighty bulk was rushing through the air at tremendous speed, while his shadow darkened the kingdom of the fishes, who were very angry and sent a sea monster with a mouth like a cavern to swallow him up. But he darted into the gaping jaws and making himself smaller forced his way through the monster’s back in such a hurry that it died. In due time the Son of the Wind swooped down upon the coast of Lanka, rested a

while to take breath, and then felt so pleased with himself that he actually laughed.

VII

"Here am I in the Isle of the Rakshasas," he said to himself. "My sea passage has been a mere pleasure excursion to me. Now, how am I to discover the retreat of Sita, I wonder?" Then he took his chin in his hand to think over the matter.

"I am very big," he said to himself, "and before I can hope to win success I must be of such proportions as will not excite attention." Thereupon he reduced himself to the size of a cat, and when night had fallen he crawled upon the wall and looked down upon Ravana's royal city. The streets were silent, but from the gorgeous palaces came the sound of sweetest music, while the smell of delicious foods assailed his nostrils. He crept silently through the streets until he came to a palace more magnificent than the others and guarded by a number of savage Rakshasas dressed in sombre garments and armed with weapons of every description. They were too large and dignified to pay any attention to the insignificant Monkey, and Hanuman was therefore able to slip by them unseen.

He found himself in a vast and lofty corridor, and, creeping along by the wall, he reached a distant apartment from whence came music such as sea-fairies make when whispering to their pink conch-shells. He put back the heavy curtains, and, looking

in, saw a number of beautiful maidens wrapped in deepest slumber, but Sita was not among them. He felt sure of this. Somehow he knew that if she had been present he would have been conscious of the fact. So he passed on to the door of another apartment whence came a sound like thunder.

It was the snoring of Ravana !

The Son of the Wind peeped in and saw the ten-headed Rakshasa sunk in heavy sleep. All his mouths were open and all his noses were snoring at the same time. Hanuman looked at him for a few moments and then swiftly made his way from the palace and into the street, where he began to reflect that after all he had failed to discover anything with regard to Sita. " She may have perished miserably," he said, " and if Rama learns this heavy news he will surely die of grief, and Lakshmana too—and all the others. Sugriva, I am sure, will weep himself to death. The joys of life are over for me, and nothing remains but to become a hermit."

At that moment the morning suddenly dawned, and, thinking it wise to hide himself from too observant eyes, he fled for shelter to a lovely grove of blossoming trees. The sight of such beauty cheered his heart a little, and climbing to the top of one of the trees he scanned the pathways of the wood. Then he saw at a little distance a group of female Rakshasas whose ugliness is beyond description, and, wonder of wonders, in the centre of the ring which they formed sat Sita herself ! Her long black hair streamed down to the ground, her eyes were down-

cast, her lips moved tremulously, her arms were stretched out, and her little hands, clenched in despair, rested upon the ground at her sides. She wore a simple tunic of a soft, bright amber colour, and in spite of her grief and dejection she was more beautiful than ever.

Presently the sound of music and merry voices came through the wood, and a band of dancing girls appeared who preceded Ravana himself. Sita sprang to her feet and gave him such a look of hatred and disgust that in spite of all his power he trembled with fear, for he was learning that love can conquer all things. Then, holding out both her arms as though she saw Rama before her, she cried in piteous tones :

“ My lord and my life ! To thee I belong as radiance to the sun.”

“ Thou shalt never see him more,” said Ravana.

“ He will come to me,” she said. “ He will be here and that soon, the Avenger of my wrongs—a Lion among the sons of men ! For this world belongs to Heaven, and Justice is its Law. Tremble, Ravana, for Rama is in pursuit of thee. Thou art a Serpent, but he is the Kingly Eagle who rids the earth of vermin.”

“ I give thee one month to forget him,” muttered Ravana, “ and if you do not, then you shall die ! ” Thereupon he turned and left the wood as he had entered it.

VIII

Sita sank fainting upon the grass, and the Rakshasas closed around her trying to persuade her that Rama was not worthy of her, seeing that he made no efforts to find her out, and threatening her with untold torture if she did not try to forget him.

“Do what you will with me,” cried the unhappy princess, casting herself prone upon the ground in her grief. “Why should I care for death when Rama is no longer with me?”

Then a strange thing happened. Sita suddenly raised herself to a sitting posture and, looking into the trees, began to listen earnestly. The Rakshasas hushed their cries and listened also, when they heard a voice which said, “Alas, alas, for Rama! An evil demon hath stolen the treasure of his heart, and always he longs for some messenger who will bid her, wherever she is, wait and trust and hope for the gladness of reunion.”

Sita looked earnestly into the trees and saw—a little monkey. Her face fell. “It was a dream,” she cried, in a fresh burst of bitter grief. “My senses fail me! But perhaps that is well, for if madness seizes me I shall forget my sorrow.”

Then she looked up at Hanuman. “Who art thou, little Creature?” she said.

“I am Hanuman, the friend of Rama,” was the reply. “If you be Sita, take comfort, for Rama will soon snatch you from the power of Ravana.”

“Tell me of my lord,” she said eagerly, “and of Lakshmana, the warrior with the laughing eyes.” Then Hanuman told her the whole of the story and cheered her heart with a full account of Rama’s grief and constancy. “Return to them—to Rama and Lakshmana,” she cried, “tell them where I am, and that if they do not come within a month I shall surely die.”

“Nay, lady,” said the little Creature, leaping lightly upon the ground, “mount upon my back and I will take thee to Rama.” Then by his magic power he assumed once more his own size and towered above the slender queen.

“Prince of Monkeys,” said Sita with the deepest possible respect, “I salute thee. But I prefer that Rama himself should rescue his own bride.”

“Be it as you will,” said Hanuman a little sadly. Then he took a respectful farewell and prepared to depart. But his heart was so full of rage against Ravana that he destroyed the trees of the beautiful grove, all except the ring of flowering saplings which surrounded Sita and her guardians. This behaviour was not calculated to advance the cause of Sita, for Ravana at once sent out his warriors, who, after a desperate fight, made Hanuman captive and dragged him before their master.

He was asked who he was and what his errand might be, and said boldly that he was the envoy of Rama, who, with the help of Sugriva’s army, meant to destroy Lanka if Sita were not at once restored to him. Then Ravana was very angry and gave

orders that Hanuman's tail should be set on fire. But Sita, hearing of the decision, prayed to the Fire, which forthwith played round Hanuman's tail without burning it; and the Son of the Wind at once reduced his size to that of a grasshopper, leapt upon a palace roof and set the building on fire with the flame, which was still playing round his tail. Then he climbed to the top of a high mountain and stretched out his arms towards the opposite shore, and as he sped through the air to the coast he heard the welcoming cries of the Monkey army.

As soon as he had stepped down to earth he found Rama in the leader's camp along with Sugriva and Lakshmana, and when they heard that the time for action had come they laughed aloud in glee, so eager were they to plunge into the fray. And while they consulted as to the best means of crossing the sea, they saw sailing towards them overhead a monstrous cloud that took shape as it drew nearer and was seen to be a colossal Rakshasa, the brother of Ravana, who quickly alighted and informed Rama that he had come to be his ally and guide. Sugriva suspected treachery, but the high-souled Rama accepted the new-comer as a friend and the consultation went forward, but no course of action could be decided upon, possibly because the counsellors were too many.

Then Rama took his bow and went down to the edge of the water, and there he shot an arrow into the deep heart of the ocean; and there was such a commotion and consternation among the sharks, and

whales, and crocodiles, and all the little fishes that they begged the Queen of the Sea to rise to the surface and find out whom she had offended. So the beautiful Spirit of the Sea arose and rebuked Rama for his anger and impatience. The warrior then questioned her as to the possibility of building a bridge to Lanka, but she said that this would not be permitted. "But build a mole across the water," she said, "and I will give your army safe passage to Ravana's realm."

Then a hundred thousand Monkeys leapt into the water laden with shrubs and stones, and they made a solid path to Lanka, while the Queen of the Sea prevented the sharks and crocodiles and other monsters from interfering with the work.

IX

It was night, and Ravana stood alone upon the ramparts of the pleasant town of Lanka. They had told him that his foes would make a pathway through the trackless sea and he had laughed, but now that he was alone with Night he knew that his hour had come, and looking out across the dark waters he saw the creeping army approaching nearer and nearer to his shores. No sound was heard while the strange warriors arranged themselves in troops and squadrons by the margin of the silent sea.

Then Ravana left the ramparts.

As soon as morning dawned he went to the grove where Sita was kept a prisoner by her guard of

monsters. He entered her cave and knelt before the princess. "Rama is dead," he cried. "He came in the night; my young warriors surrounded him and slew him. Ho, there!" he cried, turning towards the entrance to the cave, "bring me the head of Rama!"

It was easy enough for a magician to produce a head and even to ensure its resemblance to that of the hero Rama, easy enough to fill the soul of the tortured princess with terror and to plunge her heart into the lowest depths of grief, but it showed a complete lapse of intelligence on the part of Ravana to expect that the death of Rama would be followed by the winning of Sita for himself. For a time, at least, the poor princess passed beyond all knowledge of her loss and of the torture to which she was subjected, for, with a piercing cry of "Dead! My lord!" she sank to the ground in an overmastering swoon.

Ravana took his departure, and the kindly gods who had sent unconsciousness to Sita now sowed compassion in the heart of one of her guardians, who raised the princess in her arms and whispered words of comfort in her ear. "It is merely a trick," she said in a soothing tone. "Look up, my little Singing Bird. Open thine eyes. Thy hero is not dead. A vast army has landed on our shore, and among them moves one whose sad and noble countenance proclaims him to be Rama, your godlike husband."

The fainting heart of the princess revived upon

earing these words, and she graciously thanked the kindly monster for her tenderness and courtesy.

Meanwhile the Monkey army had met and utterly routed the forces of Ravana, and the leaders were even now at the gates of Lanka. Then Sugriva stood forth and warned the people of the place that the hour of judgment had come for Ravana, whose career of injustice, oppression, and cruelty was now ended. But he offered mercy to the inhabitants if the princess were at once sent out to Rama with all due courtesy and respect.

The courtiers of Ravana laughed scornfully. 'We shall see if blows be as easy as words to Rama,' said the Rakshasa, "this precious prince whose friends are Monkeys."

Then the fighting began again. Armed with trees which they had torn up by the roots, the followers of Sugriva advanced upon the four walls of the city, Rama, Lakshmana, and Sugriva choosing to attack the northern gate unaided. The battle continued throughout the day. Night fell, but the stars refused to shine upon a scene so terrible and so strange. The sounds of drums and trumpets blended with the fierce growlings of the fighters, and the two princes moved among them in a godlike radiance which surrounded their forms and served to act as a kind of strange armour, protecting them from the arrows of their foes while it singled them out in the darkness and offered what appeared to be an easy mark for the archers. This supernatural protection roused the anger of their foes, and one of

the Rakshasas called magic to his aid, mounted into the air in a chariot all unseen by the enemy, and harassed the attacking forces with enchanted arrows. So effective was this ruse that Rama and Lakshmana were both severely wounded and fell to the ground. Then the fighting was stayed and the Rakshasa in his airy chariot flashed into sight. "Behold," he cried, 'your leaders fall. Pick up your dead, ye poor deluded Monkeys; go back from whence ye came, and hide your wounds and shame in the deepest, darkest recesses of the forests to which you belong."

Sugriva ran to the side of the prostrate Rama and dropped many bitter tears upon him. But at that moment Rama opened his eyes, and seeing his brother stretched at his side, apparently dead, closed them again in despair. This had a bracing effect upon Sugriva, who flung his arms about his head and declared his intention of rescuing Sita by himself and then setting fire to the town. Then the Wind, the kindly god which cheers the heart in drought and foretells the coming of cool, refreshing showers, whispered in the ear of the half-unconscious Rama:

"Rama of the brawny arms, remember the greatness of thy heart. Be true to thyself. Thy mission is to cleanse the world of evil, which is embodied in hideous form in the persons of Ravana and his crew." At these words the heart of the hero revived, and he leapt to his feet, while Lakshmana also arose with the laughter which goes before conquest in his eyes. Then the desperate fight began again.

X

Now Ravana had a younger brother named Kumbhakarna, who was a very ugly Giant, requiring such a great deal of food that nothing was safe within his reach. He devoured everything that came in his way, everything indeed which his huge, fat, ugly, spreading feet did not crush as flat as a cake of flour. He had a simple mind and harboured no malice in his heart, but, like many other well-meaning, clumsy creatures, he did a great deal of mischief; so much indeed that most people wished that the gods would conduct him in a kindly way to some place of retreat where there was plenty of food and where he would be under no necessity of moving about to satisfy his hunger. This was the only thing which impelled him to move about, and every one felt that if he could only be fed by some one else all would be well. No one wished for his death, for he was, as we have hinted, a very jolly Giant.

One day the chief of the gods had summoned him to his presence and told him how every one was complaining of his tremendous appetite and the clumsiness of his ways. The huge Giant looked very sheepish but had not a word to say, for the weight of his body was only equalled by the apparent lightness of his mind. "I cannot judge thee harshly," said the chief of the gods, "and all that I can do is to put you to sleep."

At these words Kumbhakarna sank down with an easy smile and went to sleep.

“For one day in six months you shall be free to roam at will and to eat whatever you do not crush,” said the chief of the gods. So the good-natured Giant slept for a long time and woke for a short time, to the great comfort of all who lived in Lanka and the rest of the world.

But when Ravana found himself in great straits during the desperate war with Rama, the Rakshasa began to think that his heavy brother ought to rouse himself and help in the family necessity. “Of what use to the realm is this Giant’s enormous strength and appetite if he cannot get up, crush, kill, and eat as many as possible of these pestilent Monkeys?” This was, of course, a very natural complaint, and a company of Rakshasas at once set out for the palace of the Slumberous Giant.

As soon as they came near the gate they were blown backwards for several yards by the heavy breathing of the sleeper, but, holding each other firmly, they managed to keep their feet and to advance with lowered heads against the breeze. After an invigorating struggle they arrived at last in the chamber of the jolly Giant, whom they found prone upon his back snoring in such a manner that the huge building trembled to its very foundations.

Then the messengers of Ravana, holding fast to the wall and to one another, piled up around the couch of the sleeper mountains of buffalo flesh, whole gazelles, boars, and all manner of meats very tasty to an eater who found no delight in nuts and vegetables. They filled golden vases with fiery

drinks and placed them close to the sleeper's nostrils. Then they retired to a place which was out of the draught and awaited results.

But this plan had little effect. Kumbhakarna stirred slightly as if the pleasant odours had reached him in his dream, but the depth of his slumber was in no way disturbed. Then the messengers anointed his huge limbs with oil of sandal-wood. They sounded brazen trumpets in his cavernous ears. They shouted, clapped their hands, and leapt heavily upon his couch.

But Kumbhakarna slept and snored.

Next they brought camels and asses and elephants, and lashed them till they ran round the room grunting and hee-hawing and trumpeting with a tumult that was heard all over the town of Lanka.

But Kumbhakarna slept and snored.

So some of the messengers pulled his hair ; others pinched or pummelled him ; one bit his thumb ; others hammered him with heavy mallets and clubs ; a few leapt upon his body and ran races over him from head to heel and back again.

But Kumbhakarna slept and snored.

Then they tried a new plan. They brought to the palace a crowd of the most beautiful singing girls in Lanka, and these maidens, clasping hands, danced round the prostrate form of the slumberer, singing softly all the while, bending now and again to whisper in the sleeper's ear, and occasionally breaking into the gentlest of laughter, which sounded like the tinkling of silver bells. Of course in their

circular dance each light-footed maiden passed into the direct draught caused by the Giant's heavy breathing and the air lifted her from her feet. But the gentle ring was unbroken, and this variation only increased the beauty and gracefulness of the dance.

XI

Suddenly the Giant flung up his arms ; he yawned, and it seemed as if the roof would be rent with the sound. Then to the accompaniment of a mighty sigh he opened his eyes and lay staring in stupid amazement, while the singing maidens vanished like a dream.

Kumbhakarna sat upright. " Why have you disturbed me ? " he asked, and the shrinking courtiers, bowing to the earth, answered reverently, " Thy brother Ravana, whose servant we are, has need of your matchless valour, O glorious and resplendent Kumbhakarna."

The Giant sprang to his feet and commenced to eat and drink, while the courtiers turned their faces to the wall. When he was quite satisfied he stood up and bellowed boldly :

" Who is my brother's enemy ? "

" An army of Monkeys led by Prince Rama has already defeated him more than once. Follow us, O Prince, and put fresh hope and courage into his fainting heart."

Kumbhakarna at once set out and was received with great joy by Ravana. " Who is this Rama ? "

inquired the Giant, and Ravana turned to slander and defame his enemy, but, in spite of himself, these were the strange words he spoke: "He is of noble mind and the Friend of all Living Creatures, so that he does not disdain the help of the lowliest. I hold his wife, the peerless Sita, as my prisoner, and he has come in search of her at the head of an army of Monkeys and Bears."

"Send back Sita to her lord," said the good-natured Giant. "A bad deed weakens the arms and spoils one for honest warfare. Then, if you will, challenge Prince Rama to single combat, and let the better man win."

Ravana grew angry. "I do not need your advice, brother," he said, "but your help against my foes."

The Giant looked at him, not lazily and sleepily as he usually regarded everything, but with a strange fire of insight and intelligence in his eyes. Then he spoke slowly and clearly:

"One day I leapt from slumber and went abroad to appease my hunger. When I had done so, I sat down to rest, and Narada, the Messenger of the Gods, came and sat beside me.

"'Whence come you, Narada?' I asked.

"'From a council of the gods,' he said.

"'And what was the purpose of that august meeting?' I inquired.

"'To consider how the world could be freed from the curse of Ravana's presence,' was the reply.

"'And what was the upshot?' was my next question.

“ ‘ It was decided,’ said Narada, ‘ that Vishnu, the ruler of gods and men, should take human form and cleanse the world of Demons such as Ravana.’ Then the Messenger of the Gods disappeared,” the Giant went on. “ And if this Rama is king of gods and men in human shape, it will be well for us to yield to him without further delay.”

Ravana laughed with tenfold scorn. “ Would Vishnu choose Monkeys as his allies ? ” he asked. “ Thy wit is as small as thy bulk is large. Get thee back to thy slumbers and I will face these foes unaided.”

“ Nay,” said the Giant. “ He who *must* fight *will* fight. Show me the foe.”

Then Ravana gave his brother his pike of gleaming silver and his own cuirass of gold ; and the Giant mounted a chariot drawn by a hundred asses and drew near to the enemy. A mighty rock was hurled at him, the asses were overturned, and the charioteer fell dead. But Kumbhakarna stepped to the ground and began mowing down his enemies like a lusty harvester. In due time he came upon Sugriva, who was armed with a mighty tree. “ Hold, Monster,” cried the King of the Monkeys, “ and try thy strength with mine.”

Kumbhakarna held his sides for laughter, snatched up a rock and laid the monarch low. Then he picked him up between his finger and thumb and cried, “ Ho, you Monkeys, here is your king. It is time you went home.”

But Sugriva was not dead. With a great effort

he sprang at the Giant's face and tore his cheeks with his nails. Kumbhakarna flung him down, and Sugriva was soon among his friends once more, while the angry Giant, blinded with rage and roaring with pain, began to move aimlessly about trampling down his foes by dozens.

Before long he came face to face with Rama and Lakshmana. An arrow from the bow of the peerless prince pierced the Giant's mighty arm. He rushed blindly at Rama, but another arrow struck him in the side. With a crash like a mountain hurled down from its height the Giant fell to the earth; as his head smote the ground his great heart broke, and he died.

Still the fierce war went on, with varying fortune, until the day came when Ravana swore a dreadful oath that before sunset either he or Rama should bite the dust. So he leapt into his chariot, sought out the peerless prince, and challenged him to a final wrestling bout. Rama's answer was a stream of arrows from his mighty bow, but his enemy put them aside as though they had been drops of rain, and hurling his spear at Lakshmana brought him senseless to the earth. This roused Rama to fury and he attacked Ravana at close quarters, until the the terrified Demon took fright, turned, and fled back to Lanka.

XII

Then Rama sought out his beloved brother and found him lying, to all appearance, dead. At that

moment Hanuman came up to him, and, pitying his grief, offered to fetch from the woods which clothed the sides of a far-off mountain a plant of sufficient healing-power to restore the warrior forthwith. "Away!" cried Rama, and without delay the mighty form of the Son of the Wind cleft the air. Ravana saw him go, and, guessing his errand, sent a messenger quicker even than Hanuman to await his arrival on the mountain-side in the disguise of a hermit—there to wreck his plans for the restoration of Lakshmana.

As Hanuman alighted in the wood he was met by this hermit, who invited him to refresh himself at the stream which flowed by the place of his retreat. As he stooped to drink a crocodile clutched him by the throat, but he tore the creature in two, when, to his surprise, a beautiful maiden rose from the slaughtered reptile, and, having thanked the Son of the Wind for releasing her from a vile enchantment, vanished into the air. Hanuman went back to the hermit, who was so much surprised to see him that he threw off his disguise and the two closed in a combat which ended with the death of Ravana's envoy.

Now these disturbing occurrences made Hanuman forget the description of the plant that he had come to seek—which is not surprising. But he was not to be daunted. He broke off a projecting crag from the side of the mountain, trees and undergrowth with it, leapt into the air, carried it to his friends and bade them find the healing plant among the rest. This was soon done, the leaves were laid upon

Lakshmana's wound, and in a moment he sat up, looked round upon his friends, and laughed pleasantly.

"Brother," he said to Rama, "did I dream, or did you swear to kill this monster before night-fall?"

"I swear it now," said Rama, making the promise which no man dares to break.

Meanwhile Ravana had prepared a chariot of ebony drawn by two coal-black horses. When this was told to the gods who befriended Rama they sent to the hero the chariot of the king of the gods. It was made from a shell of the softest, palest blue, surmounted by a rich purple banner, and drawn by four horses in colour and radiance like the sun in his strength, round whose necks hung golden bells which sent forth heavenly music as they moved.

Rama leapt gladly into this resplendent car, and the battle began between Light and Darkness. Before long the flight of Rama's arrows mingled with the darts of the Demon hid the two combatants from the eyes of the onlookers. But from the shade cast by the flying shafts they heard the majestic voice of Rama, stern with virtue yet tender with compassion. "Thou poor deluded monster," it said, "tossed to and fro by all the blasts of evil, Death is near to thee, and its deepest horror is to see thyself as thou art in the eyes of the loftiest virtue." As the voice rose through the conflict it weakened the arm of Ravana in a manner which could not be accomplished even by the arrows of Rama.

"Thine hour has come," cried his calm and

terrible foe, sending a shaft which tore off one of the Demon's heads.

But the head quickly grew again and Ravana appeared to be uninjured.

"Aim at his heart," cried the charioteer of the celestial car. "The heart, not the head, is the seat of evil."

Then Rama adjusted the fatal shaft, drew the string and let it go. The hissing arrow struck the heart of Ravana, who raised his clenched fist to Heaven as if in final defiance, staggered to the edge of his ebony chariot, and, like a mountain overwhelmed by earthquake, crashed to the earth—dead.

For a moment all was still—a deep sigh ran through the watching host like the whisper of a breeze through a field of corn which is white to harvest. Then from afar was heard the throbbing of the Drums of Victory sounded by the armies of the gods. From the sky fluttered a gentle rain of flowers, a soft breeze wafted down to earth bearing the sound of celestial melodies, and round about the car of Rama danced a troop of maidens more lovely than the dawn of early summer.

"All hail to Rama!" cried the watching army. "The power of Evil is conquered by the Friend of Living Creatures, and the reign of Justice has begun."

XIII

In a low-roofed cave, the entrance to which was almost hidden by flowering creepers, lay Sita fast

asleep with her head upon her arm. She had heard from afar the distant sounds of the contending forces, but there was none to tell her of the result of the fight, for the guardians of her captivity had left her. At last, wearied but not altogether unhappy, she had sunk into a restful slumber.

She was roused from pleasant dreaming by a feeling that she was not alone, and, opening her eyes, saw the Son of the Wind standing near her couch.

"Pearl of Living Creatures," she cried, "thou hast news of Rama my lord?" Then, overwrought with fear and watching, she burst into tears.

"Weep not, my Princess," said the kindly creature. "Rama is victorious. Ravana is dead."

"And my lord is here?" she cried, clasping her hands to her breast, "and I shall see my lord?"

"He will send at sunrise," said Hanuman, "for the battlefield is dark with blood and no fit spectacle for the eyes of a tender princess."

"At sunrise he will send," she said half to herself, again and again looking at the kindly Monkey before her whose ugliness seemed transformed by the unselfish service he had rendered to the cause of Right and Virtue. But his nature was unchanged and he begged permission from the princess to enter Lanka and avenge her still further upon its inhabitants.

Sita clapped her hands and broke into merry laughter. "Trouble them not, poor things," she said gently. "I have no desire that any creature,

great or small, should be in trouble and grief any longer."

It seemed a long time waiting for the dawn ; but Sita's love for Rama was so steadfast that she did not pause to wonder why her lord had not hastened at once to meet her.

When morning dawned a messenger came to the cave bringing rich clothing, jewels, and perfumes. " Array yourself," he said, " in a manner fitting to your rank and destiny." With fingers trembling with happy eagerness the princess dressed and adorned herself and stepped into a gorgeous palanquin. In a few moments she was brought into the centre of the waiting army, and, hidden behind the rich curtains of her litter, heard at last the voice of Rama giving directions to his attendants.

But it sounded cold, distant, and strange to her. And when she stepped from her palanquin, radiant in youthful beauty, and ran with faltering feet to meet her lord and master, she was dismayed to find his face full of offended dignity and his eyes averted from her.

" Am I not worn and weary with search and combat ? And she comes to me radiant with the freshness of untired youth. Not one line of care shows upon her brow, no sign of having missed my tender guardianship ! "

Then the laughing Lakshmana was very angry. " See, brother," he said, " there stands your bride with lustrous eyes imploring you. Have you no greeting for the gentle Sita ? "

But the Demon of Jealousy had taken possession of Rama's heart, and for a time at least his nobility of soul was clouded by the evil influence. If Sita's sorrow had left so few traces upon her beauty, he argued, torturing his own soul without reason, then at heart she must have been willing enough to be parted from him ! ”

“ Alas ! ” she cried at last, turning in despair to Lakshmana, “ build for me a funeral pyre, for it is time that I should die.”

The heavy-hearted Lakshmana prepared to obey her, and in a silence which could be felt a great heap of boughs was raised. Then Sita ascended the pyre, while the flames were applied and licked the base of the structure with angry tongues. But Rama was still unmoved, in spite of the anger and grief of his faithful followers.

Then the gods, in pity for his human weakness, sent to these true lovers deliverance from the last anguish which was to trouble their hearts. From the unclouded heaven descended the god of Purity and Light in a blaze of splendour, and snatching Sita from the pyre placed her in the arms of Rama.

“ Thou didst doubt me, my lord ! ” she said with gentle reproach.

“ Forgive me, my Queen,” he said, as he folded her in his arms. “ The God of Fire has saved me from the Demon of Jealousy, and now I know thee as my Own—my tender Love.”

There is no need to tell of the joyous journey to

Ayodhya—for the fourteen years of exile were accomplished,—of the welcome accorded to Rama and his bride, or of the golden years which followed in that happy city, freed for ever from the shadow of Evil by the sufferings of the conquering Rama.



STORY II

THE GENTLE CONQUEROR

*A Tale of a Princess whose Love was stronger
than Death*



THE GENTLE CONQUEROR

I

LONG long ago there lived in the land of the Madras a noble king who ruled his people wisely and well. He had most of the things which make people happy—a stout heart, a liberal hand, great wealth and peace within the borders of his realm; but because he had neither son nor daughter his happiness was incomplete.

So the king fasted and prayed and offered unceasing sacrifice to the goddess Savitri, the Bringer of Gifts, beseeching her to send sons and daughters to gladden his royal palace and turn it from a dwelling-place into a home. And because he was brave and good and unselfish the goddess answered his prayers and sent him a daughter.

The happy monarch made a splendid birth-feast for the little princess, who was given the name of the Bringer of Gifts—Savitri.

The child grew in strength and grace and beauty, and when she drew near to womanhood the fame of her loveliness went out through all the land. So pure and perfect did she seem, so full of maiden grace and modesty, that not one of all the noble lords about her father's court dared to ask her as his wife.

One day she came before her father bearing in her arms fresh flowers, which she laid at his feet ; and then modestly folding her hands she stood with bowed head before his throne.

“ Daughter,” he said, “ the time is come for you to wed, and seeing that no one comes to ask for you, go forth and search for yourself according to our custom. Choose a prince of noble mind, and if you love him, I will love him too.”

The princess bowed to the ground before the king, her father, and then left his presence. Mounting a gaily-decorated car, she set out upon her errand in the company of some of the king’s wisest subjects. They passed through many great forests and came to many woodland towns ; and the princess watched earnestly, seeking a noble prince in whose keeping her heart could rest.

II

One day the king sat in close counsel with his chief minister and adviser, when, all unexpected, Savitri entered the hall, accompanied by the wise men. She bowed before the king, touching the ground with her forehead.

“ Tell me, my daughter,” said the king, “ what honourable prince have you chosen ? ”

“ Upon my journey,” said Savitri, “ I came to a wood in which lived a blind old king who had been deprived of his inheritance and who was living in this place with his wife and son. My choice is made,

and Prince Satyavan, the son of this blind and banished king, shall be my lover and my husband."

"It is an evil choice," said the king's counsellor hastily. "The prince is indeed noble, just, and true, and a lover of horses, graceful in bearing, liberal of hand, reverent to age, and guided by honour. *But he is fated to die within a year from this day.*"

The king started. "Choose again, my daughter," he said, but the princess replied without hesitation or confusion, "I have chosen once, my father, and whether my prince shall live one year or a thousand years, my heart is fixed."

"Yes, her heart is fixed, O King," said the counsellor, "she must have her will."

So the king consented, and gave directions for the wedding to be arranged; and when the appointed day had dawned he set out with his daughter to find the blind old king in the place of his exile.

He found the old man keeping simple state in the forest, sustained by the dignity of undeserved misfortune, and proud in his humility. The King of the Madras alighted from his horse and approached the old king as he sat under a canopy of woven grasses. The two monarchs exchanged courteous greetings, and then the exiled king asked his guest the nature of his errand.

The King of the Madras looked towards Prince Satyavan, who stood near his father, and then at his own daughter. "This is my child, Savitri," he said. "Take her to be the wife of thy son."

"How shall we do honour to so great a princess?"

asked the blind old king, "for we keep kingly state no longer."

"Thy simple state is royal," answered the other courteously. "We are equals in rank. Let it be."

"It shall be as the princess desires," said the blind old monarch; and in a very short space of time the marriage ceremony was performed, and the happy young prince was rejoicing in his unexpected good fortune.

III

Before long the King of the Madras went his way; and as soon as he was gone Savitri took off her royal robes, dressed herself in a manner more fitting for her new life, and set to work to be a helpmeet to her husband and a solace to the wife of the blind old king. So the life in the forest flowed peacefully onward; but the words of the wise man, her father's counsellor, were never long absent from the mind of the princess, and when the fateful day drew near on which the prince was to die, Savitri withdrew herself from the rest for prayer and fasting.

In the early morning of that dreadful day she came again to her father-in-law, who begged of her to break her fast.

"I am under a vow," she said, "and I cannot eat this day until the sun has set."

Then the prince, her husband, came up to her with his axe upon his shoulder, ready to go to work in the forest.

"Let me come with you," she cried, "my

dearest lord, I cannot leave you to yourself to-day."

"Nay, beloved," he said gently, "you are weak with your fasting, and the way through the forest is rough for tender feet."

"My heart is strong, my lord," she said; "let me go."

"It shall be as you will," said Satyavan, "but first beg leave of my father and mother."

The old people were loth to let her go, but, seeing that her heart was set upon it, the blind king gave her leave; and the two set out with shining faces, rejoicing in each other's presence, though the heart of Savitri was heavy with foreboding.

IV

The way was rough, but the beauty of the forest scenery drew the eyes of the princess, and for a few moments she forgot her sorrow in the joys of youth and dear companionship. But the grief returned and cast its heavy shadow over the beauty of the morning.

Before long they came to a place where the woodland fruits were plentiful, and while the princess gathered them, Satyavan set to work to cut fuel. But in a few moments he came tottering to his wife and said, "I cannot work, beloved, for a fever is in my veins. Let me rest beside you."

Very tenderly she laid him down upon the ground, and, sitting beside him, placed his head in her lap. Then she gently fanned his face, and, happening to

raise her eyes for a moment, she saw standing near her a tall dark dreadful figure clothed in scarlet and holding a cord with a noose in his hand.

Savitri rose to her feet, after gently laying the head of the prince upon the soft grass, and clasped her hands in supplication.

“Who art thou?” she asked.

“Thou art worthy to know, Savitri. I am Yama, the King of the Dead, and I am come to fetch thy loved one to my kingdom.”

Then without pause or pity he touched the form of the prince, who, in a moment, lay still and cold; and, turning swiftly, the dread King made his way towards the south with the soul of Satyavan in his keeping.

But the great love of the princess gave her untold strength and courage, and she followed the King as he passed quickly through the forest. Then Yama turned and sternly, though with some gentleness, bade her go back to the body of her lord.

“Nay, my lord is *here*,” she said, “and where he goes I must follow also. Permit me to go with thee, and as we pass onward let me say a verse to thee.”

Then in a low sweet voice the princess repeated a verse in praise of Duty. The heart of Yama was touched by her gentleness. “Ask a boon of me,” he said; “ask anything but the soul of Satyavan.”

“A boon, O King,” she said gladly; “let the blind old king be blind no longer, and make him strong with the strength of manhood.”

"Thy desire is granted," said Yama; "but now turn back, for thou art worn and weary."

"I feel no weariness when I am near my lord," she said, "except, at times, the weariness which is merely a longing for the comfort of his hand; and indeed I know another verse which tells of this."

Then in a low sweet voice the princess repeated a verse in praise of Friendship. A second time the heart of Yama was touched, and he said, "Ask any boon of me except the life of Satyavan."

"Let my husband's father," said the princess, "sit once more upon his throne and rule in righteousness."

"It shall be so," said the dread King of the Dead; "but now return, lest evil befall thee."

"I know yet another verse," she replied. Then in tones still more gentle she recited some lines in praise of Charity. The words fell sweetly upon the ears of Yama, and again he promised the princess any boon but the soul of Satyavan.

"My father hath no son, dear monarch," she said; "grant him the blessing of heirs to his royal throne."

"It shall be so," said Yama; "but now go back, for already thou hast come too far."

"I am near my lord," she said simply, "and while he is beside me no journey is too long, no way too rough. I know yet another verse, great King."

Then she recited some lines in praise of Righteousness, and once more won the promise of any boon but the life of her lord.

"I ask then," she said, "noble sons for myself, strong and virtuous, like my own dear husband." And she spoke as if Satyavan were still strong and well.

"Thou shalt be the mother of valiant princes," said Yama; "but now go back, for the path is too hard for thee."

"I know still one more verse," she said with sweet persistence. Then she said a longer verse in praise of Virtue, and as he listened the stern face of the dread King relaxed.

"Ask any gift of me," he cried at length. "*Ask the greatest boon of all.*"

"Grant me my sweet lord's life," she cried, "without which I am dead already. Give me Satyavan, alive and well."

Then the eyes of the King of the Dead grew tender, for her faithful love had conquered even his stern heart. "See," he said, "thou queen among women, for thy love the soul of Satyavan shall return, led captive by thyself in sweetest slavery; and all the boons which I have granted thee shall still be thine."

V

Then Yama turned and went quickly to his own place. But Savitri ran yet more quickly through the forest to the place where lay the body of her lord and master. Down she sank upon the earth and laid his head upon her lap, and even as she touched him the warm blood flowed once more within his veins. His white lips moved, his eyes

grew bright, and gazed with slowly dawning consciousness upon the face of his beloved wife.

“ I have slept long,” he murmured gently. “ Why did you not rouse me ? And where is the gloomy man who gazed at us so steadfastly ? ”

“ Your sleep *was* long, my lord,” she said, “ and deep likewise, for he who gazed at us was Yama, King of the Dead. But see, the night falls fast. Let us hasten home. The leaves rustle with the soft footfall of the beasts of prey ! Let us go.”

“ But we shall not see the pathway,” said the prince.

“ There was a fire in the forest to-day,” she said, “ and it still burns. I will fetch a burning branch, and we will kindle a fire and spend the night here.”

“ My strength returns,” said Satyavan, “ and with your help, beloved, I will venture ; for those we love will be uneasy at our absence.”

Then he stood up and, laying his arm across the shoulders of the princess, made his way, with pain at first, but soon with gathering strength, through the darkening forest.

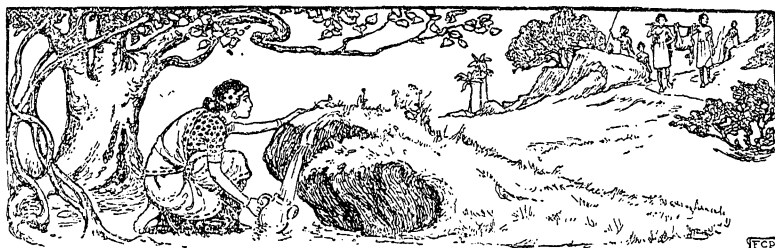
Just before dawn they reached the woodland home of the king, blind and old no longer, but strong and vigorous, with his sight restored.

All were filled with wonder, but soon Savitri told her story ; and as she finished messengers arrived to say that the father of Satyavan was restored to his kingdom. So in triumph he returned to his home, taking with him as the richest of his treasures the wife of his son Satyavan, whose love had conquered Death.

STORY III

THE FIVE TALL SONS OF PANDU

*A Tale of Arjun and Karna, and of their Part
in the Great War*



TCP

THE FIVE TALL SONS OF PANDU

I

PANDU was the monarch of the ancient kingdom of the Kurus, which lay partly along the upper course of the River Ganges and partly in the basin of the Jumna ; and he was the father of five tall sons.

The eldest son, Yudhishtir, was famous for his wisdom and his unfailing observance of religious rites ; the second, Bhima, was a warrior known far and wide for his valour ; Arjun, the third, was also distinguished for his bravery, and especially for his skill with the bow ; and the two youngest brothers, Nakula and Sahadeva, were worthy of the kinship of the others, whom they strove to imitate in all that was manly and virtuous.

Now the time came when Pandu grew tired of his royal duties, and spent a great deal of his time in the forest like a hermit. The government, therefore, passed into the hands of his brother Dhrita-rashtra, who was blind, and who had no less than a hundred sons, among whom Duryodhan was the eldest. One day news came to the palace that Pandu had met his death in the forest, and his brother became king in fact ; but the five tall sons of Pandu remained

under the guardianship of their uncle. Naturally, the sons of the new king were jealous of the five brothers; and Duryodhan, in particular, hated them with all his heart. The five brothers, however, were not concerned to hate any one. They lived contentedly at their uncle's court, engaged in perfecting themselves in all manly pursuits, as if they knew that the time would come when all their valour, hardihood, wisdom, and powers of endurance would be put to the most severe tests; and for this time it was well that they should assiduously prepare themselves.

There lived at the court of King Dhrita-rashtra an old man named Drona, who had trained many princes in the art of war. One day this man went to the king and begged him to call the princes together to a great tournament, in order that they might display their skill and prove which was the most powerful and enduring. The blind old king eagerly consented, instructed Drona to measure out the tournament ground without delay, and gave orders for the erection of stately white pavilions by the side of a green meadow at the edge of the jungle. The festival was proclaimed far and wide, and a great crowd of nobles and common people gathered to watch the feats of arms; for they knew that if the archer Arjun and his brave brothers were to be present at the tournament, the eyes of all would be delighted, and the hearts of all would be deeply stirred by the skill and bravery of the famous warrior and his brothers. It will be noted that the five tall sons of Pandu had won the favour of the Kurus by

their quiet acceptance of the second place in the kingdom, and by their uncomplaining endeavour to perfect themselves in all manly exercises instead of grumbling about their lot. They appeared to live for the future, and this gave them happiness in the present.

The morning of the festival dawned brightly, and the blind old king, attended by a brilliant company of princes and nobles, made his way to the place prepared for the tournament. Queen Gandhari and Pritha, the widow of Pandu, were among the company, surrounded by a band of the most beautiful maidens who could be found in that land of lovely women.

The first part of the tournament consisted of various trials of skill in archery, riding, and swordsmanship, in which the five tall sons of Pandu, and especially the archer Arjun, distinguished themselves above the rest. Then the trumpets sounded a shrill call, a space was quickly cleared, and there began a desperate contest between Bhima and his cousin Duryodhan, both armed with maces. The passion of the princes rose as the fight proceeded, the people surrounding the lists took sides, and the combat which began as a friendly trial of skill seemed likely to become a battle to the death. But, seeing the danger, Drona gave orders for the music to cease, and brought forward the archer Arjun, who was dressed in golden armour, to show his skill in the use of the bow. The wonder and amazement created by his performances calmed the angry passions of the

partizans. Towering high or bending to the bow, the archer shot at targets great and small, piercing them where he wished with never-failing skill. A wild boar was set free in the arena and in a moment it was laid low with five of Arjun's arrows glistening in its jaws. A horn was hung by a silken thread and allowed to sway freely in the breeze, but Arjun pierced it with more than twenty arrows. The Kurus took a special delight in these performances, for in their judgment the skill of the archer was the most valuable of all manly accomplishments. # 11-12

The tournament at last was ended, and the people were preparing to disperse, somewhat disappointed, as lovers of sport, to find that no man had been found able to cope with Arjun in skill and valour ; for there is a double charm in the unexpected, and they were ready enough to acclaim a new-comer who should be able to vanquish the hero of the hour.

At that moment a thunderous sound shook the air, and all eyes turned to the gate of the arena, where a new and unknown champion was clamouring for admission. Obedient to the command of Drona, the new-comer was at once admitted to the lists, where he won instant admiration for his lofty stature, his gallant bearing, his golden armour, and his ponderous bow. He surveyed the scene with calmness and a haughty expression of power and mastery, as though he knew himself to be superior to all who were present. " Who is this ? " asked the people in faltering whispers, but there was none to answer the question.

Then in a voice which matched his stature the stranger said to Arjun, "All your feats of strength and valour are as nothing unto mine." At once Drona took up the challenge, the lists were cleared, the spectators settled down in their places once more and watched with bated breath while the new-comer did all that Arjun had done—but no more.

Duryodhan was filled with fierce delight and came eagerly forward to embrace and compliment the unknown champion. But the stranger courteously put him aside and turned to Arjun, who was biting his lips in jealous rage. "It is with Arjun that I wish to deal," he said, "and the victory over such a warrior as yourself is the dearest wish of my heart."

Such an opportunity was not to be wasted by the master of the tournament, and Drona without delay arranged the preliminaries of the contest. In a few moments the two champions stood facing each other, ready for battle, and the herald advanced to proclaim their names and lineage.

"This is Arjun," he cried, "son of Pandu, prince of valour and warlike grace. By all the rules of war he requires to know the name and lineage of his foe." At these words the unknown warrior hung his head as if in shame, and made no reply. Thereupon Prince Duryodhan, eager to see the fight begin, and more eager still to see Arjun humbled, cried out, "He is a prince in bravery whatever his birth may be, and to make him outwardly worthy of this contest he shall be crowned as king forthwith."

Then at the word of the prince a throne was

brought, and a company of Brahmans or priests were summoned, who crowned and anointed the stranger as king of Huga, the vacant throne of which Duryodhan had the right to bestow upon whom he wished. "What return can I make for your royal gift?" asked the new monarch, whose name of Karna had been announced during the ceremony. "Your friendship is all I ask in return," was the eager reply of the prince, whose chief desire was to see Arjun humbled as soon as possible, but who did not know that the new champion was a half-brother of the hero whom he was so ready to fight. Karna extended his arms in loving friendship, Duryodhan embraced him warmly, and thus was their friendship sealed.

Then a strange thing happened. Karna turned from the glittering company of princes, held up his hand, and a charioteer, dusty and weary, dragged his feet across the arena. To this man the newly-crowned king bent his head in lowly reverence, as a dutiful son makes obeisance to his father.

"Is he the son of a base charioteer?" thought Bhima, and in his scornful anger he forgot his princely courtesy, and said aloud, "A cattle-driver's goad would suit his hand better than the sword of a monarch." Karna heard him but did not speak. He sighed heavily and raised his face towards the sun, and he seemed to those about him to be as one who prayed in silence. But his new friend, Prince Duryodhan, took up the challenge, upbraiding Bhima for his unworthy taunts, in the eagerness of his hatred speaking words of the truest and deepest

wisdom because, for the moment, they suited his purpose. "That warrior is noble who does noble deeds," he said. "Why, Drona, our teacher and master was of humble birth. Such a prince as Karna—mark him in his pride—was, I am sure," he said, contradicting himself, "the offspring of noble parents, for common people never bred so gallant a warrior."

By this time the contest between Karna and Arjun had been forgotten in the bickering and wordy warfare of the princes, and darkness fell before it could be decided which of the two heroes was the greater warrior. Duryodhan left the field with Karna, and Arjun rejoined his brothers, who in spite of their loyalty felt that in the new champion their brother had at last met a really formidable foe.

II

Day by day the jealousy and rivalry of the princes increased, and this feeling was not allayed when the blind old king announced that he had chosen the wise Yudhishtir to succeed him. The anger of Duryodhan was naturally increased by this news, and he joined his brothers in a plot against the lives of the five tall sons of Pandu. The princes were courteously invited to become the guests of Duryodhan in a house which he had just built in a distant town, and the brothers set out for this place with their mother, little knowing that their cousin had taken care to have the building constructed of the most inflam-

mable materials. But when the house suddenly took fire in the middle of the night the five princes knew that a plot was intended against them, and, having escaped with their mother, not without difficulty, they took to the forest, and dressing themselves as hermits settled down to await events.

Now it was the custom among these people that if a princess were not sought in marriage by a prince of equal or higher rank than herself, she had the right, without sacrificing her maidenly modesty, of inviting to a festival all the neighbouring princes, and of choosing a husband from among them. A festival of this kind was known as the *Swayamvara*, or "The Bride's Choice," and it was conducted with great pomp and splendour. In their wanderings through the forest the sons of Pandu heard that the daughter of Draupad, King of Panchala, was about to hold a *Swayamvara*, and they decided to go to this monarch's royal city.

As they drew near to the place they found the roads into the city thronged with the chariots and attendants of numerous princes and nobles who had come to the festival of the princess, whose name was Draupadi, and who was reported to be of surpassing beauty, with eyes like the lotus flower, and a figure as graceful as that of a young fawn. The suitors brought, according to custom, many gifts of cattle, gold, and jewels, embroidered muslin, and fruits of the rarest quality; and the king made a splendid banquet in their honour. But the five tall sons of Pandu trudged along the road, leaning upon their

rough staffs, choked with the dust, barefooted, and appearing to any who chanced to look at them to be only a group of very ordinary hermits. Their mother walked with them, tenderly guarded, but completely disguised like her sons. They found a lodging in a humble cottage owned by a potter, who little dreamt that he was sheltering a princess and five princes of the highest lineage.

Now King Draupad greatly desired that his daughter should be won by Prince Arjun, and in order to bring this about he made it known that the princess was to be given to the suitor who showed the greatest skill in the use of a mighty bow which he had made. He imposed tests of archery which he knew that no prince in the land could satisfy except Arjun himself ; for the man who was to carry off the princess was required to hit a target with an arrow which had first pierced a whirling disc of wood hung high in the air. The contest was to take place on a wide and level green, round which stood splendid pavilions of gleaming white crowned with turrets covered with shining gold.

The morning of the festival dawned in sunlit splendour, and before the heat of the day came on the beautiful princess was led out by her brother, wearing on her arm the golden bridal circlet which was to be placed upon the head of the successful suitor. The prince at once made known the nature of the test imposed by the father of the bride, and announced to his sister the name and rank of each of the princes in turn. But no one noticed the five

tall sons of Pandu standing, disguised as hermits, not far from the central group of the gay pageant. One by one the suitors came forward and grasped the ponderous bow ; but it was so tough and strong and unwieldy that in its rebound it flung each man to the earth. Then Karna stepped forward, and all felt instinctively that this was a warrior of no ordinary kind. He strung the great bow and fixed the arrow, but before the shaft was launched, to the great surprise of all, the princess held up her hand, and said gently, " I am the daughter of a king, and this man I will not wed." Without a word of protest Karna laid aside the bow, sighed heavily, and raised his face towards the sun ; and he seemed to those about him to be as one who prayed in silence.

All the suitors had now made the attempt, and all had failed. The princess hid her face in deep distress, nor was her composure restored when a tall man in the poor dress of a hermit stepped quietly but confidently forward and took the great bow in his hand. He had the air of one who was more interested in archery than in beautiful princesses, and he paid no heed to the murmuring of those around him, who inquired in scorn and anger, " Shall a hermit, however holy, stand the test when warlike princes have utterly failed ? "

The tall young prince raised his head with a gesture of pride and defiance. Then with a silent prayer to Vishnu he bent the bow with the greatest ease and shot the arrow. In a moment it was flying swiftly through the air ; it passed hissing

through the whirling disc of wood, struck the target, and brought it to the ground with the force of the blow. Meanwhile the archer had sustained the rebound of the weapon without flinching. Hermit as he was, the strange suitor was at once proclaimed the victor. Loud shouts of triumph rent the air, the sweetest of music sounded, and the princess left her pavilion, attended by her maidens, to go to meet her strange bridegroom, who, whatever his rank, had at least the form and bearing of a prince. She flung the bridal robe over his hermit's dress; she placed the bridal circlet upon his brow; and then shyly taking her place by his side she moved across the greensward towards the throne of her father, who received the youthful pair with gracious favour.

But among the proud and haughty princes there arose a murmur of complaint. "We owe much to holy hermits," said one of them, "but this insult to our rank is bad to bear. Shall a priest demean us and tread us beneath his feet like the grass of the jungle? And see how this mean-spirited monarch welcomes him! Shall we meekly endure such humiliation?" These words roused the anger of the disappointed and humbled suitors, and, acting upon a sudden impulse, they turned upon the bridal party with their bows bent and their swords bare in their hands.

Arjun was the first to notice the danger which threatened. He stepped quickly before the king and the trembling princess, and stood with uplifted bow ready to ward off any danger. Bhima had no

weapon, but he tore up a young tree by the roots and brandished it above his head like a club. But Krishna the Peaceful, a prince whose gentleness had won the love of all men, raised his hand as if to command silence. The quiet movement had the effect of instantly calming the angry passions of the suitors, and, instead of attacking the bridal party, they turned to Krishna and bowed before him in deep respect. Then, without another word, the princes turned and left the field, while Arjun led the princess to the potter's hut, where he reported to his mother that they had received a great gift that day. "Then it belongs to your eldest brother, Yudhishtir," was the quiet reply, and according to custom and law the beautiful princess became the wife of the wise Yudhishtir, while to Arjun remained the pure honour of the victory.

III

It was indeed a victory which brought good fortune to the whole family, for the alliance with King Draupad reminded Duryodhan that it would be well for him to come to terms with his five cousins. It was arranged, therefore, that the kingdom in dispute should be divided into two portions. Duryodhan, in the name of his father Dhriti-rashtra, kept the eastern and richer part, which was watered by the sacred Ganges; while the five tall sons of Pandu were given the western portion on the river Jumna, which was then, for the most part, forest and

wilderness. The brothers, however, cleared the land and built a new capital, in which the wise Yudhishtir reigned as king. Then he sent out heralds in all directions to proclaim his supremacy over the neighbouring kings, who were invited to a great festival, at which sacrifices would be made to the gods and homage paid to King Yudhishtir. A special herald was sent to Dhrita-rashtra, namely Nakula, the new monarch's younger brother, who was enjoined to speak very courteously to the blind old king, and to beg the favour of his presence at the forthcoming banquet and sacrificial feast. Even Duryodhan was included in the invitation, and consented to appear among the guests.

The new king spared no trouble to do honour to his royal and noble guests. He set up the gay pavilions in which the people delighted, he gave costly gifts to the priests, and distributed untold wealth among the poor. The sacrificial ceremony was conducted with due solemnity, and among the holy men it was credibly reported that the gods had regarded the offering with special favour, and that

“ Bright Immortals, robed in sunlight, sailed across
the liquid sky,
And their gleaming cloud-borne chariots rested on
the turrets high.”

Then followed the ceremony of anointment, a rite of special sanctity to which only kings and Brahmans were bidden. When this had been per-

formed, the newly-anointed monarch was told that, according to custom, he was required to pay honour to the man in the company of noble princes who had proved himself foremost not only as a prince, but as a counsellor, a priest, a friend to all men, and as a student of the sacred books. "Who is noblest? Who is greatest?" asked Yudhishtir. "Who is first in a company where all are noble and all are great?" Then an old monarch, who in his youth had been known as "the Terrible," but who was now famous for his wise insight, supplied the answer, "Among the great, Krishna is the greatest. Among the princes he is as the sun among the planets." Then the cup of honour was carried to Krishna, who accepted it among the applauding shouts of all the other princes—except one!

This was Sisupala, the King of Chedi, who stepped forward with his fist clenched and his eyes shining with anger. "This highest honour," he said, "must not be paid to a petty chieftain. Krishna is learned, but there are others who know the sacred books better than he. Krishna is a poet, but there are others more highly inspired. Krishna is a priest and counsellor, but there are others more sage than he."

The good prince turned towards his enemy and answered him with calmness and kindness. "The King of Chedi is my kinsman," he said, "and I have always sought his highest good, but at all times he has fought against the truth and sought to injure both me and mine. For such a man, unrepentant, death is the just and righteous portion." Then he

raised his right arm slowly and deliberately, while his eyes grew severe and terrible, and the watchers saw that he held in his right hand the terrible whirling disc which was his only weapon. In a moment it sped quickly through the air and struck off the head of the angry king, whose body fell in a heap upon the ground. Yudhishtir gazed sadly upon the fallen monarch, who had been known far and wide for lion-like courage, but no word of complaint was spoken, and the ceremonies of coronation and salutation were interrupted while royal honours were paid to the dead king.

The rites were now resumed, and the subject kings paid due homage to Yudhishtir, hailing him as their overlord and emperor, and calling down upon him the richest blessings of heaven. The newly-crowned monarch thanked them all, and preparations were made for the dispersal of the company, each of the subject monarchs being conducted to his own kingdom by a courteous band of men-at-arms appointed for this duty by their overlord. The last to say farewell was Krishna, and to the wise King Yudhishtir the parting was full of sorrow. The high-souled prince sought out the mother of the five brothers, and, reverently saluting her, wished her joy in her noble sons. Then he mounted his shining chariot, bade a last farewell to the brothers, and set out. But the new king and his brothers were still loth to see him go, and they followed his car for some distance, until he turned again to give his final counsel to Yudhishtir.

“King of men,” he said, “watch over your people without ceasing. As a loving father guard them with wise and tender compassion. Be to them a source of strength, like the cooling rain after drought, like the shadow of a lofty palm in desert heat. Bend over them in love and pity like the cloudless sky of the early day, and rule them always with a single mind.”

Then he turned away his face from the watching and adoring brothers, and in a few moments he had taken his final departure for his own city, far away by the sounding sea.

IV

Now Duryodhan had returned from the royal festival filled with still greater jealousy towards Yudhishtir, and determined to find some means of bringing about his fall. He knew that, in spite of all his wisdom and piety, Yudhishtir had one great weakness—an inordinate love of the dice-box, which was one of the most common vices among the princes and nobles of the time. Duryodhan made up his mind to use this weakness in Yudhishtir's nature to bring about his fall.

He had a friend and ally named Prince Sakuni, who had spent a great part of his life in learning how to load the dice and other wicked devices which would give him undue advantage in the vicious game of chance. This prince, at the instigation of Duryodhan, challenged Yudhishtir to a game, and the king held it a point of honour not to refuse such

an invitation ; he even left his own capital, and came with Queen Draupadi and his mother and brothers to Duryodhan's own city in order to play the game with Sakuni. The contest began, and Yudhishtir lost game after game, but, with the recklessness and fatal hope of the inveterate gambler, still went on playing—and steadily losing, first his wealth in gold, silver, and jewels, then his lordly elephants and shining chariots, then his slaves both male and female, and in time his kingdom itself.

Mad with disappointed rage and still fired with that fatal hope of regaining all by one lucky stroke, the king staked his brothers, his own freedom, and, most piteous loss of all, the queen whom Arjun had won for him, and whom he had learnt to love with deep devotion. Thus the proud king and newly-anointed emperor, the honoured friend of Krishna, became the bond-slave of Duryodhan. The sad news was brought to the blind old king, from whose sightless eyes the tears fell in heaviness of sorrow. “ Yet, by my royal throne,” he said, “ the five tall sons of Pandu shall not serve Prince Duryodhan as slaves. They shall at least be free to roam the forest, and it may be that after a time of trial the gods will restore them once more to power and happiness and deeper wisdom than they have shown. They shall pass twelve years in complete exile and one year in close concealment.”

Meanwhile, Queen Draupadi was living happily in the royal palace, all unaware of the foolish and fatal game which was being played in another

apartment. Suddenly there came creeping into the room, like a sneaking jackal, a servant from the retinue of Duryodhan, who, with ill-concealed delight, told the beautiful queen that she was now the property of his master, for that her lord the king had gambled away his kingdom and wealth, as well as the freedom of his mother, his brothers, and his queen. Draupadi rose to her feet, while her eyes flamed with anger. "Return to your master," she said with all the scorn that she could command, "and tell him that my lord was himself a bondsman when he staked the liberty of himself and his queen. A slave cannot wager wife or children, and Draupadi is still a queen." The servant slunk away, crushed and humbled, to report his reception to his master, who put him aside with angry scorn, and sent his own brother to command the presence of Draupadi, his slave. This prince was a man of violent temper, and when the poor queen refused in scornful tones to obey his rough command, he seized her by the hair and dragged her into the council chamber, where the wise counsellors of the kingdom were assembled with the five tall sons of Pandu. She stood before them all, and in piteous tones which smote the hearts of the brothers she appealed for some champion to arise and avenge the insults which had been paid to her.

Her husband and his brothers were powerless to help her, and the other princes, among whom was Karna, the deadly foe of Arjun, only met her complaints with mockery. Karna himself bluntly told her

to seek another husband who would think more of her than to gamble away her freedom with the dice-box. Yudhishtir bent his head in shame when he heard these words, so mean-spirited and yet so cruelly just, and Duryodhan did not lose this opportunity of heaping fresh insults on the head of his fallen and dishonoured foe.

Then it was told to the blind old king what was taking place in the council chamber, and he asked to be led to Draupadi. He was conducted slowly and gently to the humbled queen, and in a voice full of tenderness he said, "Noble Empress, dearest daughter, pardon the wrong and insult done to you by my luckless, graceless son. Ask a boon of me, for I am king in spite of my age and blindness." Then with many expressions of love and thankfulness Draupadi begged leave to go into banishment with her husband and his brothers. This permission was freely granted by the old monarch, who wished that the queen had begged a richer boon, but who loved her all the more for the pride which chose to suffer the ill-fortune brought upon her by the weakness of her lord, and the hope which looked forward to a happy restoration, to be won by his own repentance and virtuous endeavour.

She knew that such a man as Yudhishtir would profit by his weakness and his fall, and felt that the future would bring happiness only if he won his way back by his own efforts. As for herself, she was content to suffer with him.

So the once proud emperor, with his wife, his

mother, and his faithful brothers went out into exile, now as poor as the humblest hermits of the forest. But as he turned to go Yudhishtir spoke for the last time to the men assembled in that angry council. He had no word of blame or anger even for Duryodhan, for whom with his brothers, his father, and his friends he wished all the good that life could bring. For a while no one spoke a word in reply, for the hearts of all were filled with shame and pity. Then one of the old men rose to his feet and in words of noble blessing bade farewell to the exiles.

“Go in peace,” he said, “and envy not the fortune of those who win by evil means. Virtue attends you, Valour is your companion, Faithful Love unites you. You shall one day win a glorious empire, greater far than that which you have lost. Your exile is a trial to be bravely borne, but it will prove full of healing and refreshment. May the god of battles strengthen your right hands; may you learn the higher valour which aims at conquest of the mind. Tend the sick, feed the hungry, comfort the sorrowing, learn the lessons of exile, and return at last in happiness and true contentment.”

And even as he spoke the five tall sons of Pandu raised their heads in proud humility, strengthened and sustained by these noble words. Then they made a deep obeisance to the company and left the palace in silence.

V

For twelve long years the five tall sons of Pandu lived in the wilderness and bore the hardships which fell to their lot with patience which at times was almost exhausted. The noble prince Krishna knew of their exile, and, true to his character, sought out the brothers from time to time to comfort and encourage them in their adversity. There were moments when the courage of Draupadi failed and she urged Yudhishtir to plot against Duryodhan and recover his kingdom. But the fallen king in his loftier wisdom would not be deterred from his appointed course, and instead of seeking to harm Duryodhan went out of his way on one occasion to render a real service to his enemy. For Duryodhan came to the forest in royal state with the object of humiliating still further his fallen foe, quarrelled with some of its strange inhabitants, known as *gandharvas*, who had the double nature of birds and men, and was captured by them. Then the five brothers sought out the captive and set him free, with the result, quite natural to one of his weak character, that he hated them more than ever. Scarcely was this adventure ended, when another prince, in an unguarded moment, carried off Draupadi, and the brothers were forced to set out to rescue her, which they did with much difficulty.

There was one thing which relieved the tedium and suffering of the exiles more than anything else. Many wise and holy hermits came to visit them, and

entertained them with tales and legends of earlier days. Perhaps it was on one of the days when poor Draupadi was losing heart that a sage related the wonderful story of Savitri, whose love was strong enough to conquer death, or that other tale of devoted love which recounted the misfortunes, trials, and triumphs of Nala and Damayanti.

At last the twelve appointed years of exile came to an end, and the little band disguised themselves to pass a year in complete concealment, taking great care to hide their identity from all, and especially from Duryodhan, who was always on the watch to do whatever harm he could to them. Yudhishtir dressed himself as a Brahman and entered the court of a certain king named Virata, where he was treated with the honour always paid to a priest of his class. Bhima entered the kitchen of the same king to serve as a cook. Arjun found it difficult to conceal his identity, but having braided his hair and put on bangles and earrings became a teacher of music and dancing. Nakula was made keeper of King Virata's horses, while Sahadeva took charge of the monarch's cattle. Draupadi disguised herself as a waiting-woman and entered the household of a princess in King Virata's court.

For a year the little company lived in concealment, but when this period was just ending they were discovered in the following manner.

The cattle of King Virata, which were in the keeping of Sahadeva, were the envy of all the neighbouring kings, and at one time Duryodhan and a lawless prince

who was his friend agreed to attack Virata's kingdom from different points and carry off as many of his fine cattle as they could obtain. Duryodhan marched into the north of the country while his friend attacked the southern portion. Virata marched southward in defence of his possessions, and the north of his kingdom was left at the mercy of Duryodhan. But Arjun flung aside his disguise and came to the rescue as we are now to learn. The army of Duryodhan, under the great leaders Drona and Karna, swept over the kingdom of Virata like a swarm of locusts over a field of standing corn, and drove off sixty thousand head of cattle, the pick of the king's famous herds. Thereupon the chief of the cowherds mounted his chariot and drove at great speed to the gates of the royal palace to make his complaint to Prince Uttara, whom he urged to instant action. The prince replied that he was both willing and able to revenge his father and bring back the stolen cattle, and that if only he had a new chariot-driver, his own charioteer having lately perished in battle, he would so acquit himself that every one would declare that the famous archer Arjun had come to the help of King Virata!

Arjun himself overheard the prince's boastful speech, and begged Draupadi to tell the young warrior that he would gladly drive his chariot, and that he was quite capable of doing so as he had in past years been the charioteer of the great Arjun, and had been trained by that hero to drive the battle-car. Draupadi took the first opportunity to report

this to the prince, who replied very kindly to her, but doubted whether a mere effeminate teacher of music and dancing could drive a great warrior's chariot. Draupadi hastened to assure him that he could safely trust the dancing-master, saying that she had in former years been in the court of the great monarch Yudhishtir and had seen the same teacher of dancing and music perform almost incredible feats of horsemanship in the service of Arjun himself. Upon this assurance the prince stifled his doubts and fears, and without delay the hesitating leader was swiftly driven from the palace gate in charge of the new charioteer, who bent his course for a shady tree not far from the city, where he reined in his horses. "Prince," he said, "your bow and arrows are little more than pretty toys. Look up into the deep shadows of this tree and you will find splendid bows and arrows fit for warriors of renown, banners, swords, and coats of mail, as well as one particular bow which the strongest archers cannot bend, a weapon which is tall and slender like a palm tree, made of wood of hardened fibre, and tipped at the ends with shining gold."

The prince looked upward into the deep shadows of the spreading tree. "I see many long bundles hanging from the branches," he said in trembling tones, "and they look like bodies of men. I dare not touch them for my life."

"There are no dead men here," said Arjun, "but these cases which rouse your princely fears are full of the weapons of warriors, wrapped and hung in such

a manner that they will scare away the timorous. Prince, I beg of you to dismount and bring to a chief and a warrior his weapons and his armour."

VI

The change in the tone of Arjun's voice to a note of authority seemed to compel the prince to obedience, and, dismounting from the chariot, he climbed up into the tree and cut the wrappings of the cases. "Ah!" he cried in a voice of wonder, as the shining bows appeared, "here is a tall and stately bow, tipped with gold at either end; and another, stout and heavy, worked by a cunning artist with figures of elephants in burnished gold." Then after a short pause he continued, "And here is a third bow fit for a giant warrior; a fourth a and fifth still mightier and more beautiful. There are quivers full of arrows of most wondrous appearance, each a shaft of wingèd death; a wondrous sabre marked with a toad and encased in a golden scabbard, and another in a sheath of tiger skin ornamented with silver bells; a keen-edged scimitar in a sheath of cowhide wonderfully worked; and swords which speak of death and victory."

The voice of Arjun rang out clear and joyous, and with the laugh of a hero he cried, "Mark that bow embossed with gold which was forged and beaten by the gods for the use of Arjun himself. The other bows belonged to Yudhishtir, to Bhima, to Nakula, and Sahadeva, and the sword engraved

with the toad is the blade which Arjun has wielded in many a stern and victorious fight."

The prince descended slowly from the tree after handing the wonderful weapons to his companion. Then he looked earnestly at the charioteer and said, "Your voice is changed, and your bearing is that of one who knows. Tell me, for I know that the knowledge is yours, where is the archer Arjun? where is Yudhishtir, the wise monarch who is so sorely missed? where is Bhima, the matchless fighter? where are the younger brothers whose fame will soon equal that of their elders? where is Draupadi, the purest and the best of womankind—does she wander lonely and sad in some dark forest in danger of famine and the cruelty of fierce wild beasts?"

Arjun smiled in gentleness at the earnest words of the youthful prince. "The wandering brothers," he said, "are not far away. The good Yudhishtir lives disguised in your father's palace; Bhima has for a long time cooked food for the royal table; Nakula works in the stables of Virata; Sahadeva is a faithful cowherd; and among your sister's waiting-women Draupadi is known for her gentleness and grace." Then with an impatient gesture Arjun flung away his effeminate rings and bangles and loosed the bands from his braided hair. "Away with these," he said in a ringing voice, "Arjun stands before you!"

The positions of the two princes were now reversed. Arjun was the leader, and Uttara rejoiced in his leadership. Without loss of time the famous

archer, clad in full armour and flying his own banner, which bore a monkey emblem, was urging his chariot at the head of a strong force in chase of the retreating army of Duryodhan. In due time he overtook them, forced them to stand and to fight, and with boyish glee he entered into the battle, bending his wonderful bow and rejoicing in the music which it made. There was no further need for concealment, and it was not long before Drona knew who was the challenger who had checked the homeward course of Duryodhan's army. "Well I know him," said the old man in a ringing voice of pride, "and the sound of his mighty bow would tell me above all the noise of battle that Arjun was near. There is no need for the monkey emblem to tell *me* that Arjun leads the foe."

Then Arjun told Uttara, who was now acting as his charioteer, to rein in the horses at a spot well removed from the foe. "My arrows can search out the mark from a distance," he said, "and *my* mark is proud Duryodhan himself. If he falls, the battle is ours and the army will retreat. I do not fight with the rest, at least not on this occasion."

Arjun's keen eye swept the field for a few moments. "Duryodhan is not among the princes," he said, "he must be with the stolen cattle, and there I will seek him." Then, under Arjun's direction, the princely charioteer made a detour, leaving the main army, and set out in the direction of the flying prince. Before long Arjun overtook him, and in a short time dispersed the guardians of the cattle, while Duryodhan escaped to his friends. For the time Arjun had

attained his chief object, the rescue of the cattle, and, calling up his men, he marshalled the terrified animals in due order and drove them back to the fields of Virata.

In the royal palace he was received with acclamation, and there he found his brothers and Draupadi dressed as suited their rank, and ready to confer together as to the means to be adopted for regaining their kingdom.

VII

The term of banishment and concealment being now ended, it was agreed that Yudhishtir should formally demand the restoration of his realm. The blind old king and the oldest of his counsellors, who were able to appraise at its true value the patience, devotion, and valour of the princes, advised that Yudhishtir should be reinstated in his royal dignities ; but, as we might expect, Duryodhan and his friends would not consent to this course. Preparations were therefore made on both sides for putting the matter to the test of battle if necessary.

A council of war was forthwith called, and in the palace of Virata the princes met together to agree upon a plan of campaign. When all were assembled, it was unanimously agreed to ask Krishna for his counsel. But he did not advise directly. He calmly put the whole matter before the princes and asked for *their* opinions, thinking that in such a band of wise and experienced rulers and warriors the truest wisdom would spring from taking the general opinion.

Should the banished king lead an army at once against his foes? Or should he try the effect of another messenger of peace?

Then arose the elder brother of Krishna, and his counsel was for peace. Let them send an envoy to Duryodhan appealing to his sense of justice and asking for a frank declaration of his intentions; let him plead the cause of Yudhishtir, relying upon the known sympathy of the blind old monarch and of Drona, as well as the nobility of heart of the warrior Karna. After all, Duryodhan was the prince in possession, and Yudhishtir was a suppliant whose cause was weakened by the fact that he had, in an evil moment, yielded to the gambler's vice.

The last words of this speech roused the scorn and anger of a certain monarch named Satyaki, and he cried, "Shame upon the feeble counsel of the would-be friend, who merely pleads the cause of Duryodhan. Why cast further blame upon the wise Yudhishtir, whose patience and fortitude have now entirely expiated the momentary fault of thirteen years ago? As a king he must boldly claim his throne and kingdom, and my counsel is for open war to be begun at once and stoutly carried to a successful end. Duryodhan's falseness is his weakness, and he will fall before us. Who can stand before the shafts of the archer Arjun or the whirling disc of Krishna? Let us speed to our righteous duty, for to beg a favour from such a foe as Duryodhan is weakness beneath contempt."

The speaker ceased, and the eyes of all turned to

Draupad, the father of Yudhishtir's queen. "I fear," he said, slowly and deliberately, for he was an old man, "that Duryodhan will not bow to the opinion of his wiser counsellors, for Karna thirsts for battle, and the sending of any peaceful envoy would be regarded as an acknowledgment of weakness. My advice is to send out heralds without delay to seek allies among the neighbouring princes, and while we await their return to appeal once more to Duryodhan, for we must not forget those who will suffer from this war. It is not only Duryodhan and Yudhishtir who will be at variance, but the armies which they will lead against each other, and which have no personal quarrel with one another. Let not the hatred of the chieftains bring down upon their faithful followers unnecessary sufferings and death." This wise and humane counsel seemed good to the princes, and envoys were sent without delay to appeal to Duryodhan, but without effect. The matter was not to be settled without a war, which was likely to prove a combat of the nations and to bring upon the land such bloodshed and destruction as had never been recounted in all the records of the past. The prospect of such a calamity roused Krishna to a last effort for peace, and he hastened to the capital of the blind old king to make his appeal.

The counsellors of Dhrita-rashtra sat in silence, while the voice of Krishna, impassioned, pleading, rang through the council hall. "I come in love and peace," he urged, appealing first to the blind old monarch, "and by the power of wisdom and mercy

which adorn the aged, I beg of you, O King, to interpose between these armies ready for combat and widespread slaughter. It is to your own advantage, surely, that peace should dwell upon your borders. Restore Yudhishtir to his throne, and in the five tall sons of Pandu you shall find a bulwark of strength to your own kingdom. If war should come and you should be victorious, what would the death of the brothers profit a monarch who loves them with a father's affection ? ”

The old man sighed heavily, and soon his feeble frame was shaken by convulsive sobbing. Then his brother appealed to Duryodhan to yield and save the nations from the threatened calamity. Drona also advised the submission, which involved no disgrace but rather showed the truest wisdom—for who could stand against the might of Arjun, whom he himself had trained in feats of warfare ?

At last the blind old king spoke, while anguish shook him as the tempest tears the trees of the forest. “ Listen, my son,” he said to Duryodhan. “ Grieve not the declining years of your father with the black shadow of war. Follow the counsel of Krishna, whose wisdom can win for you an empire which this world of strife cannot bound. Seek the friendship of Yudhishtir, which is one of the richest gifts of heaven. Let all strife and hatred cease.”

For a few moments Duryodhan sat silent, with his brows contracted in anger. Then he spoke, while the listening princes held their breath to hear. “ Shall my father and my closest friends turn upon

me at a time when I most need their help? Was it any fault of mine that Yudhishtir played a foolish game and lost both his freedom and his empire? Shall we bow to the sons of Pandu while we have such warriors as Drona and Karna to lead our forces? And if indeed we fail, we shall have no pain in death when we die with the brave on the field of battle."

He paused for a moment while the disfiguring scowl of anger and hatred gave place to a look of decision and manly resolution. "Take my message," he said, "to the sons of Pandu. Tell them that they seek in vain the restoration of their kingdom. Nay, they shall not win back from me such a space of territory that a needle's point would cover."

VIII

All efforts for a peaceful ending to the dispute having failed, both sides made ready for a battle, in which all the races of Northern India were to play a part. The army of Duryodhan was more than a hundred thousand strong, including both horse and foot, as well as chariots and elephants in great array. The opposing army numbered some seventy thousand, and Krishna was among the leaders, having chosen the post of charioteer to the archer Arjun. When the two great forces met face to face, and Arjun saw at the head of his enemies the blind old king and Drona, the teacher and guide of his youth, he was unwilling to fight in such an unnatural contest; but Krishna took him aside and in earnest words of

highest wisdom told him that, in spite of all his personal feelings, Duty must be obeyed. Many were the arguments he used, and the words in which he clothed them have come down to us through the ages to prove again and again the help, comfort, and inspiration of all who are faced with the great choice of life, that between Inclination and Duty. At the end of his discourse, Arjun bowed his head in consent and took his place in the forefront of the battle which was now impending.

Duryodhan had appointed as his commander-in-chief the aged and experienced warrior Bhishma, who was his father's brother, and in the first engagement of the war he routed the Pandav forces with great slaughter. All day long his mighty bow resounded, for he was a leader who really led in the battle, and when darkness fell the five tall sons of Pandu went to their tents with their hearts filled with sorrow and dismay.

Next morning, however, Arjun and Krishna made a desperate effort to turn the tide of defeat. During this second day the dauntless archer was able to assert himself so manfully that a panic seized the chiefs of the opposing army, so that none of them dared to approach him. This roused the bitter anger of Duryodhan, who charged the leaders of his forces with secretly favouring the cause of the foe, and threatened to replace Bhishma by Karna. The aged general looked at the angry prince with a stern glance in his eye. "Your cause is unjust, Duryodhan," he said, "and the gods will not fight for you.

But I am still the leader of this army and I go now to victory or to death." Then he urged his chariot into the foremost rank of the fighting men, and fought with such fury that even Arjun and Krishna could not withstand his desperate onset. The forces of the Pandavs wavered and broke, and Krishna, seeing Arjun's indecision, bitterly reproached him and stoutly declared that he at least would not be his companion in inglorious flight. Then he flung the reins to the archer, leapt from the chariot, and rushed into the battle. But Arjun also descended from the chariot, ran after his friend, took him up bodily and placed him once more in the car. Then bending his knee in reverent obeisance he asked for pardon for his indecision and announced his intention of entering the fight once more.

In a moment the horses leapt forward, and the ranks of the warriors parted like waves before the thundering car of Arjun. Duryodhan hurled his lance at the face of the warrior, while another leader flung his heavy mace at the flying chariot. But Arjun put these weapons aside with disdain, and standing proudly aloft with his mighty bow in his hand, strung it again and again with lightning speed and with a noise of thunder. The enemy again renewed the attack, and until evening fell the fight waged fast and furious. But on that day the honour of the fight was divided, and the leaders went to their tents weary and wounded, but resolved to continue the combat on the following day with all the strength at their command.

On the next day the Kurus arranged a strong force of their best elephants with the determination of breaking the line of the Pandav forces. But Bhima, mounted in his chariot, broke their line instead, and wounded Duryodhan, whose brothers rushed to the rescue. Bhima smiled grimly as the fourteen princes closed in a ring about their brother ; then his bow twanged with an ominous music, and in a few moments six of the brothers lay dead upon the plain. His success made Bhima careless, and he penetrated alone into the ranks of the foe, to be surrounded immediately by a hundred fighters whose fierceness was their weakness, for the brave prince, though sorely wounded and in great danger, held his own until he was rescued by his friends. Again night fell and the battle was undecided.

IX

Morning dawned, and Arjun rushed into the field, his chariot drawn by milk-white chargers carrying all before it. But on this day the Pandavs received a severe check throughout the whole line of battle. Next day, however, the fight began by the slaughter of Bhishma's charioteer, and the Pandavs took fresh heart when they saw the great leader standing helpless on the field. But the old warrior had still fresh laurels to win, and, enraged by his momentary fall, he put forth renewed energy, mustered his forces, advanced steadily, and routed the Pandavs with terrible slaughter. But his fall was near.

By this time the terrible slaughter of the long-continued battle was filling the heart of Yudhishtir with sorrow and dismay. It seemed so useless, so unavailing to continue a struggle in which the two sides were filled with such grim determination and were, on the whole, so evenly matched. But on the next day the battle began again, and the fighting was fiercer than ever, while Yudhishtir performed deeds of valour as glorious as the rest.

Now there was among the Pandav forces a brave young warrior who, strange to say, had been born a princess, but had been changed by the gods into a prince, perhaps in order that the great leader Bhishma should die in battle like a true warrior and yet should not fall before his foes in an even contest. Bhishma knew the young prince, whose name was Sikhandin, and was aware of his strange story ; consequently, having sworn never to fight with "one who was born a woman," when he met him in the full tide of battle, he lowered his bow and stood defenceless. In a moment he was overwhelmed by a shower of arrows and spears and fell mortally wounded in his chariot just as the sun was setting. This great calamity united the leaders of the opposing forces for a time. It was on a couch of Arjun's arrows that they laid the dying warrior chieftain, while the archer wept for him as a son mourns for a beloved father. Yudhishtir stood near in silence bitterly cursing the war, while Duryodhan was also present to hear the dying words of the great leader. "Listen to me, my prince," he said in a gentle tone.

“ If your hard heart is capable of grief, end to-day this useless and wicked warfare. Give to the good and wise Yudhishtir the kingdom which rightly calls him lord. Let the past be forgiven and live in harmony with the five tall sons of Pandu.”

But hatred in the heart of Duryodhan was fresher than life itself, and he turned in anger from the bed of the dying warrior, who was left lonely and sorrowful until midnight. Then Karna, who had been jealous of him in his hours of triumph, came to him and spoke words of gentleness which fell upon the old man's ears like water on the parched and thirsty soil.

“ Pride and envy have dwelt in our hearts,” said the old man, “ but these angry passions leave us as the power of life sinks low. But before I go I must tell you, Karna, that Arjun is your brother. As a child you were exposed in the forest and were found by a good charioteer, who brought you up as a father. Your birth is therefore equal to that of Arjun himself, and it must be your steadfast aim to end this wicked strife of kinsman against kinsman.” But hatred in the heart of Karna also was fresher than life and stronger than the bonds of brotherhood, and he left the old man to die in sorrow, ready to engage with fresh ardour in the wicked strife.

When Bhishma had passed away the ancient Drona was chosen as commander-in-chief of the Kuru forces, and for five days he held his own against the fresh and eager assaults of his foes. He took a solemn vow to capture Yudhishtir and carry him to

Duryodhan, although he knew how difficult such a feat would be, for Arjun had decided that only the imminent personal danger of Yudhishtir would induce him to lift his bow against the new commander, for whom he still felt, in spite of all that had passed, the love and reverence of a son for a beloved father.

Now in spite of all the fierce onsets of Drona, and the fact that Arjun was under a vow not to lift his bow against him, except in defence of Yudhishtir, the forces of Duryodhan were checked again and again by the Pandavs. The angry prince, now more moody and full of hatred than ever, complained to Drona of the ill-success of those under his command. His brothers were lost, the most famous of his chieftains had fallen. Could it be that Drona's well-known sympathy for the sons of Pandu weakened his arm and checked the fury of his onset? Might it not be wiser to appoint Karna as commander-in-chief and rely upon his burning hatred of Arjun, with whom he had no kinship?

Drona's reply was short and angry. "You reap, my prince," he said, "the harvest of your hate. Do not take refuge in blaming the white hair of an ancient warrior who, in spite of your faults, will be true to you until death. The truth must be told to you—the archer Arjun has no equal in the wide world; no warrior breathes who can face him. But Drona knows his duty, and this day either he or Arjun shall die."

At that moment the sun rose in his splendour,

and all the warriors turned their faces towards its light in lowly reverence. Then they mounted their chargers, elephants, or chariots, and Drona led the way to the wide battle-plain. Arjun turned aside and would not engage with him, but the other Pandav princes and their allies had no such scruples and gathered round him, fierce as tigers, determined upon revenge for many an ancient feud. On went the fight and many a prince fell dead, among them Draupad and Virata, friends and beloved allies of the five tall sons of Pandu.

Now Drona had a son who was as brave a warrior as his father, and his name of Aswa-thaman had been given to a certain sagacious elephant famous for its steadiness and intelligence in battle. It happened that an arrow from Bhima's bow killed this elephant, and a shout went through the forces that Aswa-thaman had been killed by Bhima. The words came to the ears of Drona, who had at last found out Yudhishtir and was desperately striving to redeem his vow by capturing the prince. The old warrior bent his head in sudden pain, ceased fighting, and in a voice full of pity and anguish spoke to the prince whom he was striving to capture.

"Yudhishtir," he said, "your lips have never been soiled with falsehood. Tell me, has my gallant boy fallen in the battle? My hands are feeble, my heart fails, my work is over if this be true."

Then Yudhishtir answered, "Tusker Aswa-thaman is dead," but the old man in his piteous agitation heard only the last three words, and his

head drooped in sorrow. At that fateful moment the son of King Draupad came up in his chariot and saw his father lying dead near the car of Drona. He bent his bow, and his arrow sped quickly to the heart of the old commander, who fell dead in his chariot. So ended the fatal day, but before the chieftains retired to rest Karna was chosen to succeed Drona, for the wicked war was still to be continued when the next morning should dawn.

X

For a long time those who took delight in a well-matched fight between warriors of high renown had eagerly longed to see the meeting of Arjun and Karna, for though the two champions had faced each other several times something had always happened to prevent them from engaging in an actual fight. But now the rivals were fated to meet and to try their skill against each other.

The succession of Karna roused the courage of Duryodhan, who maintained his hatred with consistency worthy of a better cause. With words of praise he encouraged the new commander. "Bhisma was a famous warrior," he said, "but his heart was weakened by love for Yudhishtir. Drona also was a leader of renown, but his hand was palsied by affection for Arjun. Now we have a leader who is neither kith nor kin to the five tall sons of Pandu, and all *must* go well with the Kuru forces."

Karna lost no time in arranging his men and

placing himself in the forefront of the battle, and soon the warriors were falling in piteous heaps on either side. Then, at last, Arjun and Karna came face to face, each of them filled full with deathless hatred. For a moment each stood calmly regarding the other. Then a shower of arrows began which seemed to darken the face of the sky. But each of the chieftains appeared to bear a charmed life, for among those countless shafts which fell on either side not one found its deadly mark ; and evening fell without decision.

Early next morning Karna sought out Duryodhan and said to him, " Day dawns, my King, the day on which Arjun shall be slain, or my own life shall be spent. Our hearts are indeed, as you say, filled with mutual hatred, but as yet something has in a mysterious manner always intervened to prevent our putting the matter to the test of battle. To-day, however, will end our rivalry. Before the sun sets the life of Arjun or of Karna shall be over. There is no room in the wide world for the fame of both of us, for our skill with the bow is equal. Yet I own that Arjun has the advantage of me in his charioteer, for who can match the resistless onset of Krishna the divine? His sounding car skims along the plain till it seems almost to fly, and this gives my enemy an advantage which I must learn to turn to my own profit. Give me Salya as my charioteer, however, and I shall meet my foe on equal terms."

Permission was granted at once, and the famous chariot-driver took Karna into the field early on

that fateful day. For a time the new commander was unable to find Arjun, and he promised a hundred cows of the best to the man who was able to point him out, as well as "rich gifts of chariots and horses, fertile fields and wide estates dotted with peaceful villages smiling in the sun." The offer was tempting enough to men wearied with the slaughter and the sound of battle. But one of the princes near to Karna laughed at the offer. "There is no need to offer rich rewards to find out Arjun. Before many moments have passed his white horses and gleaming chariot will be seen and known of all men. Like the tiger ranging the forest he will spring upon his prey, as an angry bull he will gore to death the weakling cattle that oppose his onset, and like the lordly lion he will spring upon the shrinking timid deer of the jungle."

Karna frowned darkly at the words. Even among his own friends the praise of Arjun was sounded, and this roused his hatred to fever heat so that it consumed part of the strength which he might wisely have kept for the stern work of the day before him. Onward went his splendid chariot, while he cast his glance this way and that, longing with impetuous ardour to meet the foeman who was so truly worthy of his best endeavour. In a few moments he came face to face with Yudhishtir, who, mild and gentle as he was, had now been worked up to a heat of passion at the resistance of Duryodhan to his just demands and the consequent misery which had fallen upon the land. "You have vowed the death

of Arjun," he cried in a voice so strong and full of judgment that those about him quaked in abject fear, "but your vow will not be fulfilled, for by my hand you shall fall and through my power your soul, worn with hatred, will come at last to its rest."

Then the wise king drew his bow and in a moment an arrow was quivering in the side of Karna, who fell fainting in the bottom of his chariot. But in a few moments he raised himself again and strung his bow with a manly dignity which went to the hearts of those who watched him; for the fight between two such combatants had made a ring of silent watchers amid the noise and tumult of the battle. His arrows flew like lightning and followed each other so closely that they made an unbroken line. So heavy was their impact that they tore the armour from the body of Yudhishtir, and the wise king stood defenceless while he plied his bow with resistless might. For a long time the equal fight went on, but at last the warriors drew apart, each wearied with his efforts, Yudhishtir quiet and confident that his foe would yet be beaten down, Karna proud and full of mocking insults because the dreadful promise of the wise king was unfulfilled. Let Arjun come to him, he said, for *he* was a warrior worthy of the best.

XI

Without loss of time Yudhishtir sought out his brother, and, wearied with the desperate conflict,

could not forbear to heap reproaches upon Arjun for the plight in which he found himself. The archer replied hotly to his brother's reproaches, and it seemed for a moment as if the two princes would make the miserable strife still more dreadful by shedding each other's blood. But Krishna gently intervened, bidding Arjun keep his strength for his enemy and respect his brother, with whom he was united by ties so tender and so strong. The tears rose unbidden to the eyes of Arjun, tears of manly and generous repentance, and fixing his gaze upon his royal brother he begged him to pardon his rash and bitter words. "My own words were hasty and thoughtless," said the wise king, clasping his brother to his heart. "They were indeed the fruit of my disappointment and the ill result of my boasting. But now mount your car, stronger than ever in the goodwill of your brother, and meet this insulting foe who is bearing all before him. It may be that my words of judgment will be fulfilled in you, and after all you and I are one, and your success is as dear to my heart as any of my own could ever be."

Cheered by these words, Arjun set out again, and in a few moments the two great warriors met face to face at last. Soon the air grew dark with their flying arrows, and in a short time there was a loud report which told the practised ear that a strong bow was broken.

It was the famous bow of Arjun !

"Hold !" cried the warrior. "According to all the rules of war, a warrior must forbear to strike a

foeman whose weapon has failed him by the very might of his valour. Hold, until my bow is mended. Then will Arjun crave for mercy neither from god nor mortal foe."

The appeal fell upon deaf ears, for Karna's sense of justice was clouded by his hatred, which, more even than Arjun's valour, was to prove the real cause of his fall that day. His arrows still fell like hail about the defenceless form of Arjun, but in spite of this Arjun calmly mended his bow, unhurt by the flying shafts, as if the god of justice had put them aside with his unerring hand. Then he arose, stronger than before, as a man must ever be who has suffered unjustly without murmuring, and the arrows from his bow fell so thickly that the charioteer of Karna lost his control, and the horses, rearing and plunging, dragged the car into a place where the ground was soft and yielding. The best efforts of the driver did not succeed in moving it as Karna appealed to Arjun for a moment's breathing space. Arjun turned to Krishna to abide by his decision, and was sternly told that Karna had forfeited all right to the consideration due to those who obeyed the rules of war with a willing heart. By this time, however, Karna had somewhat recovered himself, and making the best of his position renewed the fight with vigour, sending an arrow which struck Arjun on the breast, causing him to reel and almost to fall.

But he summoned his strength, and with a last mighty effort sent the fatal shaft from the bow, which, like its master, would always bear the marks of that

desperate fight. The arrow clove the air like the forked flash of the lightning, and sped hissing to its mark. In a moment Karna lay dead upon the field of battle, and the victor raised his head, while his eyes shone brightly with the light of a conquest undimmed by personal hatred or mean advantage. Then the shadows fell, night closed quickly in, and Arjun went away to his tent.

XII

Next morning the news of his loss was brought to Duryodhan. Surely now he would give orders that Yudhishtir's righteous demands were to be satisfied so that all the useless and cruel slaughter might cease. But his hatred was unquenchable, and, deceiving himself, he took credit for valour which was not his own. He would fight to the death. Let Salya, the charioteer of the fallen Karna, take command of the shattered forces. His orders were at once obeyed. Salya fought with the skill and might of a hero, but an arrow from Yudhishtir's bow laid him dead upon the field, and Duryodhan, seeing that hope was gone, fled in abject terror from his foes.

Far away from the field of battle the fugitive prince took refuge in a humble shelter of leaves and branches which he set up with his own hands by the side of a lake in the peaceful heart of a forest. But the five tall sons of Pandu, who knew how to find their way through the trackless forest, traced him

with the watchful care of the practised hunter and found him standing like a beast at bay near the entrance of his forest home. His hatred of the brothers was still unquenched and shone with a fierce light from eyes which had become so accustomed to bloodshed and slaughter that they seemed like those of a wild beast. "Let the gods be witness," he cried when he saw the brothers before him, "that from boyhood to manhood I have hated all of you with unchanging scorn. Now we meet for the last time and I will fight you all."

"Nay," said Bhima, "it is right and wise that you should die, but you shall die like a prince in just and fair battle with *one* of us. I alone will fight you, though my task is unwelcome to me and partakes more of the nature of judgment than of the manly battle dear to a true warrior's heart." In a moment the two closed in conflict, each wielding a ponderous mace. For a long time the strife continued, for the two princes were well matched, but at last by a heavy stroke Bhima brought the angry Duryodhan down to earth. There he lay in a swoon of death while the brothers left him quickly, for a messenger had arrived to say that Aswa-thaman, the son of Drona, had treacherously slain many of the Pandav princes as they slept peacefully in their tents. As soon as they were gone Duryodhan recovered consciousness to find Aswa-thaman standing near him with the light of evil conquest in his eye. In a few low words he told his dying master how he had served the Pandav chieftains. The eyes of Duryodhan gleamed with

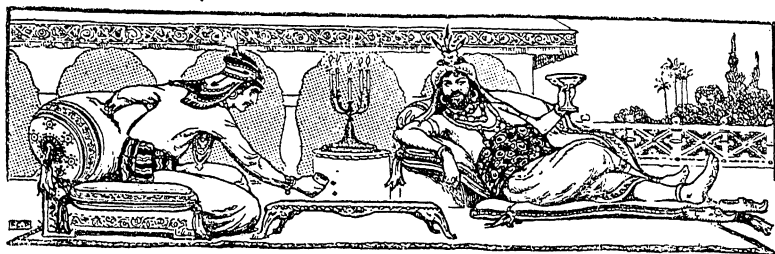
fierce pleasure, and with a mocking cursing cry of hatred upon his lips he passed away.

So ended the great war of the nations, in the destruction of all that was best and bravest and most full of youthful hope and promise among the followers of Duryodhan; in victory, dearly bought, for the five tall sons of Pandu. For a long time the land was filled with the sounds and signs of mourning—women weeping for husbands or lovers, sons lamenting fathers, brothers, or kinsmen; and the most pitiful of all the lamentations was that of the five brothers over the body of Karna; for when the funeral rites were being performed the aged Pritha told her sons that Karna was their brother and the elder of Yudhishtir; that on his birth he had been cast out to the wild beasts and rescued by the charioteer who was thereafter supposed to be his father. Then Yudhishtir himself rendered a generous tribute to the valour and virtue of their fallen foe, lamenting the cruelty of a fate which had prevented the brothers from rejoicing openly in his strength and skill. So the story ends in reunion of heart if not of life; in pity for the conquered rather than in boastful triumph over their fall; in solemn rites of consecration; and in bestowal of rich gifts upon the Brahmans whose teachings had kept the five tall sons of Pandu in the ways of virtue and strengthened their hands in the day of battle.

STORY IV

NALA THE GAMESTER

The Tale of the "Bull and the Cows"



NALA THE GAMESTER

I

THERE was once a prince named Nala who was strong and stately, brave and virtuous, pure in heart and wise in counsel ; but he loved the rattle of the dice as he loved the roll of drums.

Now the fame of his valour and virtue came to the ears of King Bhima, who had three brave sons as well as a very beautiful daughter named Damayanti ; and the princess thought much on these things, wondering whether she would know this peerless prince when they should meet. Nala heard too of the beauty and grace of Damayanti, and he heard about her so often that he began to feel a great desire to see the princess with his own eyes.

One day he was wandering through the grounds of his palace when he saw some swans near a lake, and with the instinct of the hunter strong within him he crept softly forward and seized one of them by the wing.

To his great wonder the bird spoke to him. "Kill me not, O Prince," it said, "and I will sing your praises in the ear of Damayanti."

The prince set the bird free, and without delay it

flew to the garden of the princess, where she was amusing herself with a group of merry companions. It flew down to her, and in a playful mood she gave chase to it. When it had drawn her away from her maiden friends it flew down to her and said, "Nala is the pearl of princes as thou art the loveliest of princesses. It is fitting that you should one day call him lord."

"Go, dear bird," said the princess, "and whisper a like message in the ear of Nala." And the bird flew away on its errand.

From that day onward there was no peace of mind for Damayanti ; and when her father saw how changed she was, he proclaimed a festival for his daughter, that she might, according to the princely custom of the time and country, choose a husband from among the princes who presented themselves at her father's court. The messengers of the king went far and wide, and soon the roads to Bhima's royal city were thronged with countless fighting men, with stately steeds and lordly elephants bearing princes and rulers from afar. Among the brilliant company came Nala, splendid in his strength and youthful beauty, confident in heart and fearing nothing, for he did not know that among his rivals were four of the mightiest of the gods themselves.

As he pressed onward he saw these Shining Ones coming down to earth in golden chariots. He bowed before them, asked their will, and to his pain was bidden to go to Damayanti and ask her to which of the four she would choose to be given as a bride.

In a moment he found himself transported by their power to the palace of the princess, who sat among her maidens preparing for the coming festival.

"Fairest Prince," said Damayanti, rising to her feet, while her knees trembled and her voice faltered sorely, "my heart is filled with joy to see you. But tell me, how did you enter the palace, which is so strictly guarded?"

"Beauteous Princess," said the prince, "I am Nala and the messenger of the mightiest of the Shining Ones. Choose from the four the god to whom you shall be given."

Now as he named the four the princess bowed her head in reverence. Then raising her blushing face she said, "I am yours, O Prince. Pledge *yourself* to me."

"With the Shining Ones as your suitors," said the prince sadly but eagerly, "how can a man dare to speak of himself? Lift up your heart and stretch forth your hand to take the high honour which is offered to you."

"The Shining Ones have my reverence," said the princess, "but Prince Nala has my heart."

"How can the messenger plead his own cause?" asked Nala, though a little doubtfully. Then all at once the face of Damayanti brightened, and clasping her hands she said:

"I see a way. Let the Shining Ones follow the custom, come with yourself to my festival, and there will I make free choice, according to my right. And my free choice shall fall on you, my prince."

II

With this message in his ears and joy in his heart Nala returned to the waiting gods and told his story. Then the five moved onward to obey the summons of King Bhima to the festival.

The monarch had prepared a great court with gilded pillars and with seats arranged in accordance with the rank of the several suitors. When all were seated in due order the princess entered and a hush fell upon the great assembly. She moved gracefully to her place, and while the titles and dignities of the suitors were proclaimed in due order she looked eagerly among the glittering throng for the face and form of her beloved Nala.

To her surprise she saw among the company *five princes*, each of whom she knew to be Nala himself. Her perplexity grew as she looked from one to the other, and she whispered to herself, "How shall I tell him whom my soul desireth?" Then she looked again and yet again, but still her amazement and distress increased, until at last she clasped her hands together and silently but fervently prayed the Shining Ones to make known to her the prince of her choice. She knew only too well that four of the five had only the appearance of Nala and that they were the gods themselves.

Then the Shining Ones took pity upon her distress and made themselves known by signs which were unmistakable.

They stood without a shadow; their eyelids did

not move, however brightly the sun shone ; their faces, in spite of the heat, showed no sign of sweat ; when they moved, they glided over the ground without touching it ; the flowers upon their brows bore no dust. But Nala cast his shadow ; his robes were stained with dust ; the flowers of his garland were beginning to fade ; the sweat stood in great beads upon his forehead ; his feet trod the solid earth, and in the strong light of the sun his eyelids fell and rose.

In a moment the princess knew her mortal lover, and with a cry of joy she said, " I know thee, Nala, and I claim thee as my chosen lord and husband."

When Damayanti had made known her choice, the other suitors were generous enough to wish Prince Nala joy, and even the Shining Ones cried out ; " Well done ! " Then the happy prince pledged his word to be true and loyal to Damayanti while the breath endured within his body ; and the Shining Ones gave him many wondrous marriage gifts.

He was to have the power to see with his own eyes the god to whom he offered sacrifice. Help was to be sent to him whenever he should call for it in prayer. He was to have skill in cooking, and whenever he spoke in times of heat the breeze was to spring up and ripple all the waters. These and other gifts having been bestowed at the wedding feast, the Shining Ones departed and Nala took his bride to her new home.

III

For some years the prince and princess lived in great happiness, while Savitri, the Bringer of Gifts, sent to them first a son and then, a greater boon still, a daughter who promised in time to become a second Damayanti. But now their happiness was destined to be overcast, for Kali, the brooding god of evil and malice, envied Nala the brightness of his life, and vowed to bring upon him and upon his faithful wife a doom both swift and terrible.

"I will bring his kingdom down to the dust," said Kali. "I will break the bond of love between him and his wife, and I will do all this by means of the love of the dice, which only slumbers in Prince Nala's heart." Then he wrought in such a manner upon the mind of Nala that the fever of chance and hazard entered into the blood of the prince and prepared him for his fall.

At that moment Nala was in the company of his brother Pushkara, to whom Kali, unseen, suggested that he should challenge the prince to a game of chance with the object of taking from him all he possessed. Then Pushkara took the dice-box containing the ivory cubes, a large one named the "Bull" and smaller ones known as the "Cows," and, seating himself near his brother, said, "Play with me, brother, at the game of the 'Bull and Cows.'" At first the noble prince refused, but being urged again consented roughly, and the game began in earnest.

But Nala did not know that Kali was hidden within the " Bull " !

Such a game could have but one ending ! Nala lost his jewels and his personal ornaments ; next the rich and ponderous vessels of gold which adorned his royal palace ; then his chariots and the horses that he loved with all the strength of his warrior heart ; and at last his robes of royalty, rich with cloth of gold and gems of shining light.

And still the fever of chance and hazard was unsubdued ; nay it increased with each successive loss, for at each throw of the dice he hoped to win again what he had lost.

For Nala did not know that Kali was hidden within the " Bull " !

News of the game was brought to the people of the city, and they came in crowds to the palace gate to show their sorrow for what they called the sickness of the well-loved master. Then word was brought to the princess of their presence, and she went herself to her husband to tell him that the chief men of his city desired to speak with him.

But the fever of chance and hazard burnt so fiercely in the blood of Nala that he would not speak a word to his trembling wife ; and when this was told to the counsellors at the gate they hung their heads in sorrow and said to one another, " Our master is himself no longer." Then they went away, sad at heart, while the foolish game went on and the brother of the prince won and won again.

For even yet Nala did not know that Kali was hidden within the " Bull " !

IV

Damayanti sat in her chamber brooding over her sorrow, angry at the fault and weakness of her lord, but loving him even better than before. Then, suddenly, a bright thought came to her, and, calling her nurse, she told her to summon the ministers of state to a council in the king's name. At once they came to the palace, but Nala would not come to them, and they sat in the council hall filled with dismay.

Then Damayanti called the prince's charioteer and begged him, with the consent of the counsellors, to take her two children to her father's house. This was done while the foolish game went on and on until nothing was left to Nala but Damayanti herself.

" Shall we play for the princess ? " mocked Pushkara, but Nala rose, threw aside his royal robe, and went out from the palace in the single garment of a beggar. And at his side walked Damayanti, meanly clad and filled with sorrow. So they passed through the gates of the city into the forest, and Pushkara, the new monarch, sent out a herald to proclaim that any who should offer help to Nala would meet with instant death.

The people of Nala's royal city were obedient to Pushkara's command and gave no help to the outcasts, who wandered from place to place, cold and weary, footsore and hungry. Then Nala urged his

wife to leave him, and eagerly explained how she would be able to find her way through the forest to the home of Bhima, her royal father.

For the first time Damayanti showed signs of weakness and distress. The loss of wealth, power, happiness, even of her children, had not broken her spirit ; but that Nala whom she loved so well should think her willing to leave him in his sore need bowed her head to the earth, and the first tears that she had shed during this unhappy time fell into the dust upon which her lord lay prone in his weakness. "Nay," she said gently, "in all sickness of heart there is no better medicine than love.

"Yet," she added, "if you think it well that I should go to my own people, I will do as you desire, but only hand in hand with you, my lord and master."

But Nala answered, "Never shall I return as an outcast to the court of your father, where I carried off my bride in the face of gods and men."

So they wandered onward, always hand in hand, until they came to a deserted hut and crept within its shelter to rest. There they lay down and slept.

But the sleep of Nala was troubled and distressed, and after a while he woke to face the thoughts that haunted him. If the princess would not leave *him* for her good, he must leave *her* for the same reason.

Thus he debated within himself, while Damayanti slept serenely, for her mind was untroubled by any doubt as to what *she* ought to do ; and she felt at rest in the assurance that Nala in his grief still loved her

better than his own soul. So she could sleep like a child while he kept anxious watch.

At last he rose and left the hut, but he came back to gaze once more upon the sleeping princess. Thrice he went away and thrice returned for one last look. Then, with his lips compressed and his eyes tightly closed in agony, he broke away and ran at great speed through the forest.

The princess awoke from her profound and dreamless sleep refreshed and happy ; but when she found that she was alone a sudden terror seized her.

“ Nala,” she cried, “ my lord and master, why hast thou left me ? ” Then she laughed gently, assuring herself that it was all a jest, and she called out playfully to her husband thinking that he was hiding not far away. But there was no answer to her call.

She rose to her feet, staggered out of the hut, and ran back and forward crying out as if she had been driven mad by her grief. But in a short time this fury spent itself and she began to blame her selfishness. Surely Nala was in danger somewhere and in need of her help while she, the faithless one, spent precious time in useless wailing ; and with this thought in her heart she plunged into the depths of the forest.

But as she ran blindly on with stumbling feet through the tangled undergrowth a great snake seized her and wrapped its hideous coils about her body. “ Nala,” she cried, “ Nala, help me ! For if I die what will my lord do who has such sore need of me ? And when he comes again to health and wealth how will he enjoy these good things without me ? ”

V

At that moment a hunter passing through the forest heard her cries of distress and with an arrow from his bow killed the snake and set the princess free. With graceful words and queenly gesture Damayanti thanked him and quickly went on her way again pursuing her desperate search. The hunter warned her of wild beasts, and the warning filled her heart with terror lest her lord should have already become the prey of some of them. For herself she had little fear, and indeed it seemed as if her unselfish love was a greater protection to her than a legion of armed men ; for she stepped out with such confidence and bore herself with such a queenly grace that the fiercest beasts of that dark forest dared not venture near her. And ever as she went onward she called upon her lost one in the hope that he might hear and come to her once again. But there was no sound in reply, and only the growls and cries of hungry wild beasts broke the silence of the forest.

All at once Damayanti came face to face with a prowling tiger. " I'll speak with him," she said to herself, " and ask him whether he has seen my prince. And if he has not seen him, perhaps he will put an end to my misery." So she spoke in gentle accents to the fierce beast, which turned as if stricken with awe and wonder, and made his way through the tall grasses to the river, which shone in the sunlight through the reeds.

Then the princess sank upon her knees and

prayed to the gods for guidance. She spoke most of Nala, and as she described his gentleness and manliness, his kingly power and wisdom, his love for herself and his constant care of her, fresh courage seemed to rise within her fainting heart and she felt strong once more and able to pursue her search again. On she went to the northward, travelling for three nights and days in fruitless search, until she came at last to a cool grove in the forest, a paradise of restfulness and peace, where a number of holy men had made their home.

The hermits were filled with amazement when she came among them, but seemed to know instinctively that she was a queen among women; and they bowed reverently before her while they spoke words of welcome and encouragement, asking her in all simplicity whether she were a goddess of the wood or of the stream.

“I am no goddess,” said Damayanti, “but a woman, the daughter of King Bhima and the wife of the mighty Nala.” For now the princess had quite forgotten the weakness of her husband and remembered only his royal state and the kingly nobility of his heart and soul; and once more she found strength and encouragement as she described him to these holy men and sang his praises with shining eyes and blushing cheeks.

“Fear not, princess,” said the most reverend of that hermit band. “Before long you shall see Nala, and see him restored to health and wealth and happiness, and Nala shall have you once again as

the sharer of his joy and his helpmeet in the government of his kingdom."

Now as the old man spoke he and his company vanished from the sight of the princess and instead of the pleasant hermitage she saw before her only the dark gloomy glades of the forest. For a long time the princess gazed around her in bewilderment and then went on her way again till she came to a beautiful tree which bears a name meaning "the end of sorrow." The name reminded her of her need, and she spoke softly to the tree, for she felt impelled to pretend that the inhuman things of the forest were her companions to save her wearied brain from the madness of lonely despair. Passing onward once again she came upon a company of merchants with horses, elephants, and waggons making their way across a stream. She came suddenly among these men, and they gazed at her in great amazement. Some thought that she was a goddess of the woods, and falling on their knees before her begged her favour upon their enterprise. Others were afraid of her and ran away in their fear, while others again mocked at her and roughly told her to make known her name and her purpose.

The princess spoke gently to the leader of the caravan and asked the question which was now the whole of her life.

"Hast thou seen Nala, my king? Quick, tell me, and if thou canst, bring me comfort."

"We saw many evil beasts in the forest," said the captain, "but we neither saw nor heard of him you

seek. We are passing onward, and for your protection, princess, you are welcome to go with us." And weary with her loneliness Damayanti joined the band of merchants. But one night while the company was resting a herd of wild elephants set upon them and trampled many of them to death. Others escaped into the forest, though some fell dead with fear, and the whole company was dispersed and scattered. Then some blamed the princess for this misfortune and began to search for her to put her to death, if indeed the elephants had not already killed her in their mad stampede. But Damayanti, hidden beneath a fallen tent, heard what they said, and effecting her escape she wandered on once more into the forest, until she came to a great clearing where stood a royal city shining gloriously in the sunlight.

Weary and footsore, clad in a single ragged garment, the princess passed through the streets of the city followed by a crowd of wondering and mocking children, until she came to the gateway of the king's palace. Now at that moment the king's mother was walking upon the roof with her attendants, and when she saw Damayanti with a jostling crowd around her, and knew from her gait that she was of noble birth, she sent a messenger to her begging her to come within the palace; and there the wandering princess told part of her sad story, concluding, as she always did, with loving praise of Nala. For whenever she spoke of him to a third person she forgot all his weakness, and in piteous

tones told only of his love and loyalty, his manliness and steadfast purpose, his kingly power and wisdom. This alone sustained her in her time of trouble, this alone was to her thirsting and sorely-tried spirit a source of never-failing refreshment and consolation.

The royal mother begged her to stay with her for a time while she sent messengers in every direction to search for the lost prince. Damayanti consented, and was conducted at once to the king's daughter, who was of her own age; and this princess led her gently to her own apartments, where she was given the duties of one of the ladies-in-waiting.

VI

We must now return to Nala. When he ran into the depths of the forest, he saw a flaming fire, from the heart of which came a voice which said, "Come hither, Prince, and fear not." Then without hesitation he sprang through the flames and found a great serpent lying on the ground.

"I am the snake Karkolaka," it said, "doomed to lie here until Nala shall come by. I promise to help you if you will help me. Grasp me without fear and carry me hence."

Nala laid his hand upon the great reptile, which at once shrank to a finger's length. He lifted it up, and as he did so the fire went out. "Do not lay me down," said the snake, "but take ten steps forward." Nala obeyed, and at the tenth step the serpent stung him.

Nala flung it down and it rose from the earth not a reptile but a man. "You have now within your veins, O Prince," he said, "a venom that will torture the evil spirit which possesses you until he leaves you free. Fear not; seek the city of the Raja Rituparna and take service with him as a charioteer—thy name for the time to be Vahuka. Ask him to teach you his skill in numbers in return for your knowledge of horsemanship. Thus shall you learn the wisdom which can cope even with Kali, and in due time you shall be restored to your children, your wife, and your kingdom."

Then the strange magician gave to Nala a magic robe and disappeared from sight. The prince set out with a light step and a lighter heart, and in the space of ten days came to the city of Rituparna, where he took service as a charioteer under the name of Vahuka.

"Make my horses like the wind for speed," said the Raja, "and great wealth and comfort shall be thine."

And Nala put forth all his skill, in return for which Rituparna gave him wealth as he had promised and such bodily comfort as can be given by one man to another. But comfort of heart he could not give, for Nala's longing for Damayanti was at times almost more than he could bear.

One day his kindly companion Jivala overheard him giving expression to his longing and questioned him upon the cause of his evident trouble. Then Nala told him a story of a man who had a noble

wife and lost her through his own cowardly weakness, and as he drew near to the end of the tale, he suddenly confessed that he himself was the subject of the story; and his friend was full of sympathy and did his best to comfort him, but to little purpose.

VII

Meanwhile the Raja Bhima, the father of Damayanti, had never ceased to search for the lost prince and princess, promising rich rewards to any who should bring him news of them. Messengers were sent far and wide, but for a long time the steadfast search was unavailing, until one day one of these envoys came to the city where Damayanti had taken refuge and chanced to see her in the company of the Raja's daughter. She looked worn and weary with fruitless longing, and of her surpassing beauty only the brightness of her eyes and her grace of movement now remained.

"It is indeed the princess herself," said the messenger. "No man can mistake that nameless grace in spite of woe and weariness. Ah, noblest, loveliest, best! You wear no royal robe but that of constancy, no jewel but that of undying love.

"I will speak to her," he went on, and reverently approaching the princess he said:

"O wife of Nala, I am Sudeva, your brother's friend and your royal father's messenger, sent to bring you home."

The eyes of the princess brightened, and eager

questions broke from her lips. "Is there news of Nala? Are my children well, my father, my brother?" Then it was told to the mother of the Raja that Damayanti was engaged in eager conversation with a stranger and she summoned the man to her presence. There he was bidden to tell all he knew of the strange lady—for Damayanti had only told part of her story to her new friends in the palace—and, seating himself before the royal mother, he told the story of the prince and princess so far as it was known to himself. As the piteous tale was unfolded the eyes of the listener glistened with unshed tears of love and sympathy; and when it was ended she consoled the sorrowing princess with womanly tenderness and gave orders that she should be at once conveyed with fitting dignity to Bhima's royal city.

So Damayanti was brought amid quiet rejoicing back to her father's house, where she found her children, father, mother, brothers, and kinsfolk all well and eager to ease her sorrowing heart. She greeted them tenderly and graciously, but when the first glow of happiness was past Damayanti knew only too well that except she could find Nala life had no further joy or solace for her.

So the Raja Bhima redoubled his efforts to obtain news of the missing prince; and he sent messengers of proved wisdom and valour to question all men as to his whereabouts, giving them a sentence which they were to speak without variation when making any inquiry, so that the words might become well known

throughout the land and be repeated so often that they might haply some day hit the mark and bring the wanderer home. And the words were :

“ By every husband nourished and protected
Should every wife be. Think upon the wood ! ”

The messengers passed through forests and woodlands, towns, cities, and villages, visiting the most remote haunts of hermits and lonely huts of shepherds, ever asking for news of Nala.

After a long time a messenger returned to Damayanti. “ One day I came,” he said, “ to the city of Rituparna, where I spoke the sentence which was given me. Now in the train of the Raja was a charioteer whose name was Vahuka, who had great skill in horsemanship, and he having heard my story spoke these words to me :

“ Although her lord forsook her, she’ll not yield
To wrath, even against that vile offender.”

The eyes of the listening princess grew suddenly tender, and graciously thanking the messenger she sought out Sudeva who had found her in her loneliness and said to him :

“ Go to the city of Rituparna and say that without delay a second *Swayamvara* will be held in Bhima’s royal city, and a second time Damayanti will choose a husband, since no one knows whether Nala is alive or dead.”

Sudeva set out at once for the city of Rituparna, and, hearing the news, the Raja bade his charioteer

prepare to make the journey on the next day. Then the heart of Vahuka was filled with anguish and dismay, which was soon succeeded by indignation at the princess for what he considered her disloyalty. But, obedient to his master, he prepared the chariot for the journey, and he drove so swiftly to the festival that Rituparna was filled with amazement and said to himself, "Surely no charioteer ever drove so well since Nala himself held the reins."

He watched the man as he drove with admiration not unmingled with envy at his skill; and, eager to show that he too was a master of a difficult art, he said to Vahuka as he drove swiftly onward:

"How many leaves and fruits have fallen from yonder tree?"

"I know not," was the answer.

"Of leaves, one hundred and one," said the Raja, "and of nuts five score."

"That is indeed wonderful," said the charioteer, "and I will stop to test the truth of your saying."

Then without heeding his master's anger at the delay he checked the horses, counted the leaves and nuts and found the number exact. He climbed again into the chariot, and said, "Prince, I have skill with horses and you with numbers. Let us make exchange of gifts."

The Raja, filled with admiration at the manly strength and skill of his charioteer, at once consented to make the exchange and imparted to Vahuka by a kind of magic power his knowledge of numbers. Now as soon as Nala felt that he had mastered the

art a wonderful change took place ; for the evil spirit Kali who had ruled his life and poisoned all his thoughts forsook him and stood in visible shape trembling before him.

“ Have mercy, great King,” said the god of chance and hazard. “ Spare me in the righteousness of your wrath, and it shall be that in future years the mention of your name will be the salvation of all those who fall into the hands of Kali.”

Then the evil spirit, who had only been seen by Nala, disappeared from sight, and the prince, mounting the chariot once again, urged the horses onward, swifter than before. His heart was light and his head was held aloft. But, piteous to tell, he had no longer the glorious figure of manly strength which had in the old days won the heart of the beautiful princess ; for his body was gnarled and twisted from exposure and privation so that it was certain that he would not be known in the great festival of Damayanti’s choosing.

But as Nala entered the city the trampling of his horses and the rattle of his chariot-wheels recalled to the mind of many the exploits of horsemanship for which he had been famous of old ; and even the princess in her bower was reminded by the sound of her lost lord and master.

“ I shall see him to-day,” she said, as she clasped her hands to her bosom, “ and, if not, I shall surely die.”

VIII

Now Damayanti had not told her father that she had sent any message to the city of Rituparna, and when the Raja went to greet the monarch Bhima the latter was greatly surprised to see him and to learn at what a desperate speed he had performed the journey to the city. But he did not question his guest as to the reason for his visit, and Rituparna was conducted to his retiring chamber with the courtesy and honour due to his rank. Meanwhile Vahuka took his chariot to the stables, unharnessed and groomed the horses, and then sat down, alone and forgotten, upon the driving seat.

The princess had watched the chariot as it drew near to the window of her bower, and was much surprised to see that it was driven by a misshapen charioteer. So when the Raja had himself retired to rest she sent a maid for the man, intending to question him. For, strange to say, in spite of his withered arm and stooping form she felt that he was in some way connected with the story of her loss. But she was so disturbed and full of trembling apprehension, of fear mixed with unreasoning joy that as the maid turned to do her bidding she called her back again and told her to question the man herself.

In a few moments the handmaiden returned and told what she had heard—that the man was the charioteer of Rituparna but that he seemed to know more than others knew of the story of Nala and

Damayanti. Then the princess told her handmaiden to keep a close watch upon Vahuka and to see that on no account was he given fire or water. The girl followed the commands of her mistress very closely and soon returned with widely-opened eyes of wonder.

“What had she seen?” “The man was surely more than mortal. When he came to a low doorway he did not stoop, but the lintel raised itself of its own accord; when he wanted water, if he looked at the pots, they filled at once to the brim; and when he wished to cook he obtained fire instantly by holding out a knot of withered grass in the rays of the sun. And, strangest of all, he had taken up some withered flowers and as he idly played with them they became as fresh as the blossoms of the springtime.”

By this time the princess was convinced that the man was Nala himself, and she sent her handmaid to bring her from the kitchen some of the meat which the strange charioteer had cooked. The girl did so, unknown to the man, and when Damayanti had seen and tasted the food she broke out into laughing and weeping, declaring in piteous tones that the man must be Nala himself.

Next she sent to him by a nurse his own two children, whom he clasped within his arms and embraced with tears of love and yearning. Then, seeing the eyes of Damayanti's handmaid upon him, he excused himself for his show of feeling by saying that the little ones were wondrously like his own!

When this was told to the princess she was still further convinced, though the altered form of Nala caused her to entertain a doubt. She now begged permission of her father to speak to the charioteer, and in a few moments Nala stood before her with beating heart and eyes filled with tears,

For a while Damayanti could not speak, but when she had conquered her emotion she said :

“ Did you ever know a man, Vahuka, who left his wife alone in the woods ? ” Then she stopped, while the ready tears coursed down her cheeks and fell upon her folded hands.

“ Not I, but Kali who possessed me,” said the prince, no longer seeking to conceal his identity. “ But now the evil spirit is gone,” he went on, “ and the end of all our unhappiness is in sight. Yet tell me first how you could bear to send out messengers for a second festival of choosing ? ”

A tender and somewhat mischievous smile broke on the face of Damayanti. “ My lord,” she said, in pleading tones, happy in his jealousy, “ it was only my woman’s wit which prompted the plan. Did I not know that you would bring the chariot of Rituparna first within these walls ? ”

Then, wonder of wonders, Nala, having called to memory the great snake which he had delivered from the fire, was suddenly changed into his proper form and stood before his princess strong and vigorous, kingly and handsome. In a moment husband and wife were clasped in each other’s arms.

For a long time they sat without speaking, and then they began the story of their wanderings, which lasted for many hours. When it was ended the face and form of Damayanti were changed and seemed to take an added beauty from remembrance of the love and loyalty of her lord.

After a month of rest and peace Nala prepared to set out for his own city, driving a splendid car which Bhima had given to him, and accompanied by a train of sixteen elephants, fifty horsemen, and six hundred foot soldiers. As soon as he came to his palace he sought out Pushkara, who, knowing that the prince had now all knowledge of numbers and divine power over chance and hazard won for himself by his sufferings, gave up the inheritance which he had won by no valour of his own.

So Nala was restored to wealth and happiness, freed from the gamester's restless craving, and blessed once more with the loving companionship of Damayanti and her children.



STORY V

THE POOL OF ENCHANTMENT

A Tale of the Triumph of Wisdom over Death



✓ N.B.

THE POOL OF ENCHANTMENT

ONE day King Yudhishthir and his four brothers were wandering in a forest and were greatly distressed for want of water. Far and wide they searched, but without success, and at last they all sat down, exhausted, beneath the shade of a spreading tree.

Then the king turned to Nakula. "Climb up a tree," he said, "and look around to north, south, east, and west; then tell us whether you can see any pool of water or any plants which will not grow except by the cooling stream. For if we do not quickly quench our thirst, we shall surely die."

Without hesitation Nakula obeyed the command of his eldest brother, and in a few moments called out in a cheerful voice, "I see some plants which will not grow except by the cooling stream, and I hear the sound of cranes."

"Go, then," said the king, "and fill your quiver from the water which gives life to those things."

Nakula at once set out, and in a few moments found a clear pool filled to the brim and the red-crested cranes stalking solemnly about near its margin. He threw himself down to drink of the

water, but as he did so he heard a solemn Voice which said,

“ Drink not, O Prince, before you have answered my question.” But Nakula was too much exhausted with thirst to pay any attention to the warning Voice and drank eagerly of the cool, refreshing water ; and in a few moments he lay dead among the tall reeds by the margin of the stream.

For a while the four brothers waited in patience for the return of Nakula. Then the king said, “ Our brother lingers. Go, Sahadeva, and bring him back with you, and bring your quiver also full of the precious water.”

Staggering with weakness, Sahadeva made his way through the forest and in a few moments he saw Nakula lying dead among the reeds ; but so great was his thirst that upon seeing the water he could not wait a moment and flung himself down by the brink of the pool.

Again the grave, remorseless Voice was heard breaking the silence of the forest. “ Drink not, O Prince, before you have answered my question.” But before the words were spoken the prince had drunk of the water, and in a few moments he too lay lifeless among the reeds.

Once again the great king waited with what patience he could command, and once again he spoke, this time to his brother Arjun, the mighty bowman. “ Go, Arjun,” he said, “ and bring back your brothers, and bring your quiver also full of the life-giving water.”

Arjun lifted up his bow and arrows, and with his sword in his right hand made for the pool. When he saw his brothers lying dead among the reeds, he stood for a moment as if in a trance. Then, like the warrior that he was, he fitted an arrow to his bow while his keen eyes pierced the darkness of the forest in search of the enemy. But when he saw no sign of man or beast, he too stooped to drink and, stooping, heard the grave, un pitying Voice which said, "Drink not, O Prince, before you have answered my question."

Prince Arjun raised his head and spoke in anger. "Come out," he cried, "and fight with me." Then he sent arrow after arrow in all directions in the hope of slaying the unseen foe ; but a laugh mocked him and the remorseless Voice repeated the command, which the Prince disregarded ; he stooped, and drank, and died.

For a while the great king waited, and then turning to the last of his band of brothers he said, " Bhima, our brethren do not return. Seek them out, bring them back, and bring your quiver also full of the refreshing water."

In silence Bhima obeyed the command, and found his brothers dead among the reeds. " Some Rakshasa has brought them to their death," he said, but his thirst was so sore that he could not resist throwing himself down by the side of the pool, and, heedless of the grave Voice, he also bent his head, and drank, and died.

Last of all came the king himself with his dark

brow knitted in perplexity. He saw the welcome pool shining like a silver mirror in the sunlight, with its ring of golden cups of the lotus, its margin set with lilies, reeds, and sweet rose-laurel. Then he saw his four brothers lying lifeless by the margin, and in spite of his thirst and weakness he named each in turn and spoke of the great deeds which had lifted him above the crowd, bitterly lamenting their death in such a manner unfitted for warriors of their strength and skill.

“It is the work of some evil spirit,” he said at last, “for their bodies bear no mark of violence, nor is the ground around them marked with human footprints. The water, too, is clear and fresh, no poison stain can be seen upon their faces, and my great thirst consumes me. I will stoop to drink.”

Now as he did so the Spirit took the shape of a grey red-crested crane, and spoke to him. “I sent your brothers to their death,” he said, “and unless you can answer my questions, you too, great King, shall follow where they have gone.”

“Who art thou?” asked Yudhisthir boldly. “Make thyself known and what is required of us.”

“I am no bird,” was the reply, “but a Rakshasa”; and even as he spoke the dreadful Being took shape, towering above the lofty palm-trees, shining in splendour brighter than the sun, glowing a ruddy colour like the evening cloud, and moving to and fro so as to dazzle the eyes of the beholder.

“ Question me,” said the wise king, “ for so, it seems, stands the law ; and I will use what wisdom has been granted to me in making answer.”

The Spirit questions : What is it which helps a man to keep the soul free from the body, pure and holy, wise and lofty, rising above the thought of evil as the crane o’er-tops the reeds ?

The King replies : It is worship, so the holy books inform us, and in the end the purified soul is freed from the body which encumbers it.

The Spirit questions : How can a man come to the knowledge of God ?

The King replies : By constant study of the holy books. ✓

The Spirit questions : How can a man enjoy peace, do well the work entrusted to him, avoid sin, and keep his spirit meek ?

The King replies : By reading the holy books and by meditating upon their meaning, by avoiding slander and cruelty, which sears the soul.

The Spirit questions : Who is it that, having all the appearance of life, does not live at all ?

The King replies : The man who is blessed with goods and keeps all for himself, caring not for gods, or guests, or kindred, or friends.

The Spirit questions : What is that which is heavier than the world ? What mounts higher than the clouds ? What flies quicker than the winds ? What grows quicker than grass ?

The King replies : The love of a mother is more weighty than the earth. A father’s fondness reaches

higher than the heavens. Thought can outstrip the winds, and sorrow grows quicker than grass.

The Spirit questions : Who sleeps with open eyes ? What is born alive but does not move ? What moves without having life within it ? What grows as it goes ?

The King replies : A fish sleeps with open eye. An egg is born alive but remains at rest. Stones roll but have no life. Rivers increase as they move to the sea.

The Spirit questions : What is the best help to goodness ? How can a man win fame ? What is the best path to heaven ? How shall a man win happiness ?

The King replies : Strength of will attains to goodness. Fame can be won with gifts of self. Truth is the best path to heaven. A gracious spirit comes to happiness.

The Spirit questions : What are the second souls of men ? Who are the best friends ? What is the greatest of all joys ? How may poor men win wealth ?

The King replies : A man's sons are his second souls. His wife is his best friend. Health is the greatest of joys. A contented spirit is wealth untold.

The Spirit questions : What is the chief of virtues ? Which is the most fruitful ? What best can ease deep grief ?

The King replies : Charity is the best of virtues. Reverence is the most fruitful. Conquest of self gives rest.

The Spirit questions : What enemy is hardest to conquer ? What disease lasts as long as life ? Who is the most upright man ? Who is the most wicked ?

The King replies : Anger is man's worst foe. The pain of greed never forsakes the heart which holds it. He who loves best is holiest. A cruel man, is most wicked of all.

The Spirit questions : Is a man holy by birth-right ? Does he make himself holy by reading of the sacred books or by living a true life ?

The King replies : No man wins holiness except by his conduct. If a man of an evil nature knew the holy books right through, he would still be evil.

"Most pious and learned Prince," said the Rakshasa, "you have replied to my questions with wisdom and truthfulness. But yet, tell me who lives although he is dead, and who is greatest and richest of all men ?"

"Though a man's body die, his virtue and goodness may survive. He is greatest and richest who has nothing, needs nothing, and so possesses all."

"Drink of this fair water, O King !" said the Spirit, "and choose which of your four brothers shall join you again in the joy of life."

"Let Nakula live," said the king, "my beloved with the eyes of fire and the form of gracefulness."

"Why not Bhima or Arjun ?" asked the Spirit.

"I am named 'the Just,'" said the king, "and 'the Just' I will remain. Nakula is my half-brother, while the others are as my own soul. Shall my own

mother see her sons returning in joy while the mother of Nakula weeps her loss? Let Nakula live."

Then the Voice spoke sweetly as the Form receded. "Noblest of princes and wisest of men for thy love and justice *all* thy brothers here return to thee."



STORY VI

THE PRINCE WONDERFUL

*The Tale of a Prince who taught the Law by which all
Men must live*



THE PRINCE WONDERFUL

I

UNDER the southern slopes of the snowy Himalaya lived a happy race of people who were ruled in justice and mercy by King Suddhodana and the good Queen Maya ; and when a son was born to the royal pair there was great rejoicing in the palace, for the soothsayers had promised the new-born prince all the seven gifts of perfect kingship.

The king gave orders that his royal city should keep high festival in honour of the birth of the prince, who was to bear the name of Siddartha. The streets were therefore diligently swept and sprinkled with rose-water, the trees were hung with lamps and flags, and a whole army of entertainers was hired by the royal host to amuse the people. There came also into the city a numerous company of merchantmen, bringing rich gifts for the prince in trays of gold as a mark of gratitude for the king's good government, which made possible their peaceful and profitable traffic.

Among the strangers who came to the festival was a grey-haired holy man, who, by his long and austere life, had acquired heavenly wisdom far beyond

that of any saint known in his day. The king and queen greeted him with special reverence, and made haste to lay the new-born prince at his feet. When he saw the boy he bowed before him, touching the dust eight times with his forehead as he would do in worship before the gods; and he murmured holy greetings which filled those who stood near him with wonder and with awe. "Thou shalt preach the Law," he said, "and save all men who learn the Law, though I shall never hear; for I shall die too soon, though of late I have longed to pass away."

Now when Prince Siddartha was seven days old his mother died, and the care of the child passed into the hands of the king, who lavished every kind of tenderness upon the motherless child, and tended him in person until the time came when he thought it wise to seek a tutor for the boy. He called a council of his wisest men and asked them who was to have charge of the young prince's education. They at once named a sage who had a reputation throughout the world for his intimate knowledge of the holy books, who was, moreover, learned in the subjects which enlist the interest, uplift the mind, and satisfy the soul of mortal men, and who knew also how to teach the prince the use of his hands.

The next day the sage came to the palace, and the prince was at once sent to receive his instructions. His father had given the boy a slate of ox-red sandalwood, set all round the frame with precious stones, and sprinkled smooth with emery dust, upon which the little pupil was to trace his letters or figures as

required. The first lesson was what we call dictation, and it lasted a very short time, for whatever verses from the holy books the sage recited were at once set down in writing by this wonderful pupil. "It is enough," said the astonished teacher at last. "Let us proceed to a lesson in counting. Repeat your numbers in due order—one, two, three, four, to ten, and then by tens to hundreds, and to thousands." The pupil began and exceeded his instructions, for he went on to the numbers which are used to enumerate the grains in heaps of finest dust, then to those which are used to note the stars at night, and finally those which are only necessary in counting the drops of the ocean. "I could go further," softly murmured the child, "and give you those numbers which tell of all the drops that in ten thousand years would fall on all the world in daily rain."

"It is enough," said the sage, falling upon his face in reverence before his pupil. "You are the teacher of your teachers, and I worship you, sweet Prince. You come to my school to show that you possess all knowledge without the need of books, and that you know what is still better worth knowing—how to reverence those older than yourself."

The teacher went his way, and Prince Siddartha was given into the charge of skilful men, whose knowledge was not of books but of the chase and of all forms of manly exercise. And no bolder horseman in the band of youthful pupils ever rode forth to hunt; no more skilful driver of the chariot ever drove his car in triumph and boyish enjoyment

round the palace courts. But in the hunt the boy would often pause when the chase was hottest to let the deer pass free ; or he would stop just when he seemed likely to win a chariot-race because the gallant horses appeared to be straining themselves too much ; and then he would stand looking straight before him with wistful gentle eyes as in a picture.

One beautiful day in the spring-time he stood in the royal garden, and happening to look upwards saw a flock of wild swans heading northwards to their nesting-places on the side of the snowy Himalaya, and as they flew onward he heard the love-notes pass down the winged line. Then his cousin, Devadetta, drew his bow and carelessly shot an arrow, which struck the wide wing of the leader, and the bird fell into the garden near the two princes. It was not killed, but its beautiful plumage was stained with drops of scarlet blood. Prince Siddhartha took up the bird with tender care, and sitting down with ankles crossed—his favourite attitude—tried to soothe with tender words and gentle caresses the wild thing's fright. The bird, after a few nervous flutterings, settled down under his left hand, while with his right the prince drew the cruel arrow from the wound, which he dressed with cool, green leaves, anointed with honey. The boy, up to this moment, had known nothing of pain, but as he lifted up the arrow it happened to scratch his wrist, and he winced as he felt the sting. Then, understanding in some degree what the innocent creature had suffered, he

fondled and soothed it once more with renewed tenderness.

A messenger then came from his cousin, who had gone away in disgust at what he considered Prince Siddartha's weakness, to ask that the swan which he had shot should be sent to him. But the prince refused on the ground that the bird was not dead. "My cousin," he said sadly, "has merely destroyed the glorious speed with which the bird winged its way through the air."

Then Devadetta came to plead his own cause. "The bird belonged to no one in the clouds," he reasoned, "but being now on the ground it is the property of him who brought it down." Then Siddartha laid his smooth cheek against the swan's downy neck. "No," he said gently, "the bird is mine by right of mercy and the lordliness of love; but if the matter is to be in dispute let us submit it to the wise men." This was done at once, and one sage said this, the other that, until an unknown man arose who said, "He who saves a life owns it, not he who seeks to destroy it. Give Prince Siddartha the bird, for it is his own." This was done, and the king turned to reward the unknown counsellor, but no one could see him; but as they looked round the council hall they saw a snake glide silently over the threshold and quickly lose itself among the thick bushes of the palace garden; and all remembered that the gods sometimes take this form. Next day the prince set free the bird, which was now quite healed of its wound, and watched with pleasure, keener even than

that of a victorious hunter, how it mounted quickly through the air and joined its companions, which had hovered about the neighbourhood as if in search of their lost leader.

A little later the prince rode out with his father, who wished to show him the scenes of happy country life which gladden the hearts of the best when the winter has passed away and spring appears once more. The prince noted the country folk at their work, the mating birds in the forest, the villagers following their varied occupations, and under the spring sun all seemed beautiful, bright, and happy. But the boy saw into the heart of things more deeply even than his wise father. He saw how the sower and the ploughman were forced to work far beyond their strength in the effort to gain a scanty livelihood, how the animals and birds and fishes fought and preyed upon each other, and these things filled his heart with pity and sorrow. So he reined in his horse, sat down with ankles crossed, and fell into deep meditation on these weighty matters. He sat there thinking until long past noon, and, wonderful to relate, the shadow of the tree under which he sat did not move that day, and one who passed by and noticed this strange thing heard a voice, which whispered, "Let the prince alone, for till the shadow leaves his heart my shadow will not move."

II

When Prince Siddartha came to the age of eighteen years the king gave orders for the building of three

houses—one of wooden beams and cosily lined with cedar wood, to provide a protection against the cold of winter ; one of marble, cool and pleasant, to form a summer retreat ; and one of brick, ornamented with tiles, to afford a pleasant place from which the varied scenes of the opening year could be observed. These houses were set in the midst of a large and pleasant garden with shady walks, fair lawns, and cooling streams, and the estate was given to Prince Siddartha for his own use and enjoyment. He found much pleasure in the king's gift, and showed true appreciation of it ; but though life seemed to have showered upon the young prince every possible advantage, he was often very pensive and sad.

The king noticed this sadness, as indeed he could scarcely help doing, and calling together his ministers, he asked their advice upon the matter. He hoped to make his son a king of kings, a ruler of the rulers of the earth. Was this to be his destiny, or did his quietness and sadness foretell that his rule would be rather over the hearts and souls of men ?

“ Seek a wife for him,” said one of the sages, rather abruptly ; “ he will forget his sadness in the joy of her beauty and grace. Command a festival and summon to it the fairest maidens in the land. Let them contend in graceful exercises, and let the prince award and present the prizes. Then as the maidens pass before his seat it will be strange indeed if some one among them does not please him.”

This advice seemed good to all the council, and the festival of maidens was proclaimed without

delay. They came in troops in answer to the call, with dark hair smoothly braided and dressed in shawls and robes of gayest hue, their slender toes and finger-tips fresh stained with crimson dye. The prince sat on his throne looking at them pleasantly but coldly, like one who stood aloof from all the world; and when a beautiful maiden came up to him, and the people around proclaimed her as more lovely than all the rest and more worthy of the richest prize, the prince gazed upon her with such an expression of lofty dignity mingled with gentle courtesy that the girl, after giving him one shy glance, fled back to the company of her mates with evident relief.

The presentation of prizes was drawing to a close, and to the despair of the king's counsellors Prince Siddartha had not yet shown any special favour to one of the maidens; but the last maiden of the band drew near, whose name was Yasodhara, and those about the prince saw him give a sudden start. She was indeed a girl of the rarest beauty, who, unlike the others, looked steadily in the face of the young prince, and, folding her arms across her bosom, asked in a low sweet voice, "Is there a gift for me?" "They have all been bestowed," said the princely youth, "but take from me this gift of my own to make amends." Thereupon he unfastened an emerald necklet which he wore about his throat and clasped it round her waist; and as he looked at her he knew that she was the bride for him.

Then the ministers, who had carefully noted all that had passed, went off in great haste to tell the

king, who was delighted at the success of the plan, and at once sent messengers to the father of Yasodhara to ask the hand of his daughter in marriage. "It is the custom," said the father of the girl, "that when a maiden of such a noble house as mine is asked in marriage, the suitor shall first prove his skill in the arts of war, and this good custom cannot be broken even for a king so powerful as the father of Prince Siddhartha. Let the youth show his strength in the bending of the bow. Let him wield the sword and manage a horse better than the crowd of suitors who already seek my child in marriage. He must be best among the best or he is not fit for the best of all maidens; and how he can prove his manliness after a life of contemplation more fitting for a hermit than a prince I, for one, fail to see."

When this message was reported to the king he was very sad, for he knew that the foremost warriors of the day had come to ask the hand of Yasodhara, and he had little confidence in the manly powers of his son. But the prince himself laughed low when he heard what message had been brought by his father's envoys, and he said to those about him, "I have learned these arts also, and I do not think I shall lose my love for all the warriors of greatest renown." Then it was announced that seven days later the Prince Siddhartha would be prepared to meet all comers to match his skill against theirs for the prize of prizes, the beautiful Yasodhara.

On the appointed day the suitors came together, and the maiden was taken to the place of meeting

dressed as a bride and surrounded by her kinsfolk. The prince came too, riding his white horse Kantaka, and as he passed along his eyes lingered longest upon the common people, who had come in great crowds to see the contest ; nor could he help thinking that, after all, these people, like kings and nobles, had their joys and sorrows which also filled their lives but which were of little consequence in the eyes of the world. Then his eyes fell upon Yasodhara, and smiling gently he leapt to the ground and said aloud, " He is not worthy of this pearl of pearls who is not worthiest ; let my rivals prove if I have dared too much in seeking her."

Then three of the suitors came up to the line for the arrow test and shot so far and so true to the mark that the princess dropped her golden veil over her eyes as if she could not bear to see the arrow of her lover fail. But Prince Siddartha gave orders for his target to be set up at such a distance that it seemed like a mere cowrie shell to those who stood near the mark. Then he took up the strong bow provided for him and strung it with such strength that it snapped in two. " This bow is for play and not for love," he said. " Is there no bow here which is fit for a warrior to wield ? "

" There is a bow in the temple," he was told, " which no one yet known can string, nor draw when it is strung." " Fetch me," said the prince, " that weapon of a man." Then they brought the ancient bow, which was made of steel as black as ebony, and the prince challenged his rivals to the use of it.

But they failed in the task, and, with a happy smile of boyish triumph upon his face, Siddartha raised it, fitted an arrow, and sent it through the air like a lightning flash. It struck his far-off target, pierced it through, and skimmed along the plain for a great distance before it finally came to rest.

The three suitors, still undaunted, came now to the sword contest, and showed marvellous strength and skill in cleaving with one blow the trunk of a tree, the wood of which was particularly tough and unyielding. Then Siddartha selected two of these trees which grew close together and clove them both at one blow with perfect ease. So smooth was the cut that the upper part of the trees did not fall from their erect position, and the princess began to think that the edge of her prince's sword had failed. But as they watched, a gentle breeze sprang up, and the trees swayed for a moment and then fell, amid the loud shouts of all the beholders.

Then the rivals mounted their horses and a race began, in which Kantaka easily outstripped the others. "These steeds are tame," said one of the suitors; "fetch an unbroken charger and put the matter to a man's test." So they brought a fierce-eyed horse which no man yet had ridden and which was with difficulty restrained by three chains of ponderous weight. With manly courage the three rivals of Siddartha tried to ride the furious beast, but all were thrown, and one who showed most endurance, strength, and skill was only saved from being trampled to death by the help of the sturdy grooms.

Then Prince Siddartha stepped up to the infuriated animal and, taking it by the forelock, spoke a gentle word in its quivering ear and laid his right palm across its eyes. Next he drew his hand softly down its face and along its neck and sides. In a few moments the animal stood calm and subdued, and did not stir even when the prince mounted upon its back. Then, obedient to the touch of his knee, it moved quietly across the plain.

A great shout now arose for the victor Siddartha, and it was suggested to the suitors that further contest would be useless. They agreed to waive their claims, reluctantly enough, and the father of the princess commended the victor, adding the remark that how a prince reared in a garden and spending his youth among bowers of roses could have learnt such mastery of the manly arts, passed all comprehension of mortal men.

Then at a given signal from her father, Yasodhara rose in her place and, taking a crown of flowers in her hand, stepped down and advanced slowly and gracefully to meet her lover, who stood at the side of the black horse which he had just tamed by his gentleness. She bowed before the prince with unveiled face and flung the garland of fragrant flowers about his neck. Then for a moment only she laid her head upon his breast, and, stooping, touched his feet as she murmured gently, "Dear Prince, behold me, who am all thine own." At once the prince took the maiden by the hand, and when she had once more covered her face with her veil of black and gold the

happy pair passed slowly through the thronging crowd, who rejoiced loudly in the issue of that day. In due time the wedding feast was celebrated with all the customary rites, and the father of Yasodhara finally gave the maiden into the keeping of the young prince. "She that was ours," he said, "henceforth is only thine. Be good to her for her life is wrapped up in thee." Then Siddartha took his bride to a beautiful pavilion which the king had erected as a pleasure palace at the foot of the snowy Himalaya.

Every effort was made to surround the prince with all that was pleasant and agreeable, and the king gave strict orders that among the young men and maidens who formed the household of the princely pair no mention should be made of death or age, sorrow, or pain, or sickness. If one of the attendants fell sick, he or she must leave that happy place at once. It was counted treason if a silver hair appeared among the tresses of a dancing girl, and she was at once removed. Each morning the dying roses were plucked from the trees and the dead leaves were carefully hidden. For the king was determined that no sign of decay or sadness should cause the prince to assume that wistfulness which had cast a shadow upon his youth before his happy union with Yasodhara. "So shall I see him grow fit to become the king of kings and glory of his time," said the monarch to himself, using words of which he little knew the meaning. And as a last precaution he built around the pavilion and its gardens a massive

wall, and in the wall a gate with folding doors of brass, so heavy that it took fifty men to move it. Within this gate he built a second and within that again a third, and the stern order issued to the three bands of warders was, "Let no man pass this triple gate, even if the prince himself should sue you for permission to go through."

III

The days passed in gentle quietness undisturbed by the troubles and chances of the outside world ; but occasionally when the prince rested from the noonday heat Yasodhara would hear him murmur gently, " My world ! I hear ! I know ! I come ! " Then the bride's eyes would open wide in fear, and she would ask, " What ails my lord ? " for his look was so lofty and remote that for the moment he seemed more than mortal. But, gently soothing her, he would call for music, and the young pair took almost childish delight in setting up on the window-ledge a gourd with strings through which the gentle breezes played the sweetest melodies. To the young bride the sounds were sweet enough, but to the bridegroom the airs played by the breezes seemed to come direct from heaven itself, not with soothing sweetness, but as a call to action.

*" We are the voices of the wandering wind :
Wander thou too, O Prince, thy rest to find ;
Leave love for love of lovers, for woe's sake
Quit state for sorrow, and deliverance make."*

The words of the song seemed to haunt the ears of the prince, and one morning he gave orders for his chariot to be prepared in order that he might go forth and see the world. News was brought to the king of his son's intention, and he made the best of the situation by giving consent to the prince's excursion, and sent his servants into the streets of his royal city to make the following proclamation: "Hear, ye citizens. It is the king's command that during this day there shall be seen in the city no blind, maimed, sick, or aged person, no leper or funeral ceremony. Let the streets be swept, watered, and perfumed, and red powder sprinkled on the steps of your houses. Let the trees be decked with flags and the idols freshly gilded."

The royal commands were instantly obeyed, and when the prince drove forth in his painted car drawn by two white humped oxen, the people greeted him with shouts of joy and welcome. "The world is beautiful after all," said the prince to those about him. "I pray you, take up that pretty boy who threw flowers to us and let him ride in my car." This was done at once, the child showing quiet pleasure at the novelty of his situation, and the little procession passed onward amid shouts of appreciation at the gracious condescension of the prince. But in a moment the happy throng was checked by an old man clad in dirty evil-smelling rags, who crept from a hovel by the roadside and made his way with pain and labouring effort to the edge of the crowd around the car of the prince. In piteous tones he

begged for alms, and as he spoke a racking cough almost choked him. "Get to thy den," muttered those nearest to the old man, "before the prince shall see thy misery." But before he could be hustled out of sight the prince did indeed see him, and began to question the driver of his car about him. "He is old and worn," said the man, making light of his misery, "and he has had his day. Why should the Prince trouble himself about him?" "Then shall all who now are young and happy come at last to this?" asked the prince. "Even so," said the man. "Shall it be thus with me, and with Yasodhara, and with this happy child here in my car?" he went on. "It shall be so indeed," was the reply. "Then turn and drive me home again," said the prince, with a wistful look in his eyes and a cloud across his brow.

The man obeyed, and in spite of all the efforts of the attendants in the high-walled palace of pleasure there was no happiness for the prince that day. As evening drew on Yasodhara sank at his feet and cried, "Hath not my lord comfort in me?" "We shall grow old, my bride," said Siddartha, with a frown upon his brow, "old and ugly—and all my thoughts are how to cheat Time of his victory." And through all the night he sat with ankles crossed, sleepless and refusing to be comforted. News was brought to the king of his son's sadness, but all that he could think of was to double the guard at the triple gateway in the ponderous wall of the palace of pleasure.

A few days later the prince sent a message to the

king, begging for leave to see the city in its usual state. "I ought to know my people and their simple ordinary ways and learn the nature of the lives of those who are neither kings nor princes." The king wisely gave his consent, but consoled himself with the thought that familiarity with scenes of unhappiness and misery would perhaps prevent the prince from thinking too deeply upon them. So on the next day the prince, disguised as a merchant, went out with a companion named Channa who was dressed as a clerk, and the two took their way on foot into the town, where they mingled with the crowds in the busy streets.

They saw the traders sitting cross-legged among their wares, and the buyers driving their hard bargains. They heard the hoarse shouts to clear the road when some lordly person was driven by on an elephant, or a closed litter was borne quickly past to the tune of the bearers' song. Here was a housewife bearing water from the well with her black-eyed children balanced on her hips. There was a weaver busy at his loom, there a woman grinding corn between the millstones, and in a quiet side-street a barber attending to the toilet of a customer. They peeped into a school and saw the children seated in a half-moon round their teacher while they chanted their verses in a childish sing-song.

These and many other sights of daily life they saw, and they noted all with the keen interest of travellers from a far-off land. Now as they passed along they heard a mournful voice which cried,

“ Help, masters ! lift me to my feet ; oh, help ! or I shall die before I reach my home ! ”

They looked down and saw a poor plague-stricken wretch writhing in the dust at their feet, the sweat standing in great beads upon his brow, while his mouth twitched with the agony of his sufferings. The prince ran forward at once, and tenderly raising the man, laid his head upon his knee and gently tried to soothe him, but in his ignorance of disease and pain he was not able to be of any real help to the sufferer. “ What is it, Channa ? ” he asked in anxious tones. “ What makes him writhe and moan ? ” “ He is stricken with some foul disease,” was the reply, “ and it must work its way with him before death brings him sweet relief. But, my Prince, it is not good that you should hold him so, for the disease may pass from him to you.”

“ Are there others like him ? ” asked the prince, paying no heed to his companion’s warning, “ and shall I come to a like condition ? ” “ Sickness comes to all men,” said his companion, “ and it comes like the sly snake at times, to strike when one is least prepared.” “ And what comes at the end of all ? ” asked the prince. “ Death,” was the answer.

The eyes of the prince suddenly filled with tears, and he turned his face upwards to the sky as if he saw some vision. “ At last,” he said, “ my eyes are opened. I am as other men, prone to sickness, liable to death. Yet there must be help for all, for if I were one of the gods I would not let one cry who

needed help. Channa, lead me home again. I have seen enough."

So they took their way back to the palace of pleasure, and when the king heard what had passed he set a still stronger guard upon the triple gate.

IV

Through many hours of contemplation it was borne in upon the heart of Prince Siddartha that his life within the palace of pleasure, guarded by the lofty wall and shut in by the triple gate, was utterly unworthy of him. He was at heart by no means weary of his lovely home, its smiling gardens, its palaces enriched with all that the greatest artists could conceive and execute, its laughing, joyous attendants and the tender love of his youthful bride. These things filled him with joy for which there is no expression, but the sorrows of the outer world called him insistently, urged him to leave all that was pleasant and enervating, and to take a part in righting wrongs and relieving the burden of the world. The great decision was reached one night when all but the prince were sunk in peaceful slumber. The midnight sky sparkled with countless stars, and the cool air fanned the flushed cheeks and brow of the prince as he took his solemn vow of renunciation, while Yasodhara slept.

"O summoning stars, I come ! O mournful earth !
For thee and thine I lay aside my youth,
My throne, my joys, my golden days, my nights,

My happy palace—and thine arms, sweet Queen !
Harder to put aside than all the rest !
Yet thee, too, I shall save, saving this earth ;

Now am I fixed, and now I will depart,
Never to come again, till what I seek
Be found—if fervent search and strife avail.”

Then bending down he touched the feet of Yasodhara with his brow, and fondly gazed upon her as she slept in peace. Three times he tried to leave her but thrice came back. Then with one last lingering look he passed out of the house into the quiet garden, where, looking upward, he seemed to see the stars still beckoning to him, while the gentle wind fluttered the fringe of his robe. A soft and soothing sound as of gentle music from the skies seemed to whisper in his ears, and the blossoms of the garden unfolded their petals to send forth odours of heavenly fragrance. For a short time he stood as if to gather strength and inspiration for his mission. Then, rousing himself, he walked rapidly towards the place where Channa slept and in a sharp tone of command bade him awake and bring out his charger Kantaka.

The charioteer rose slowly from his couch. “Why does my lord desire to ride when all the world is asleep?” he asked in wondering drowsiness.

“Speak low,” said the prince, “and bring my horse, for the hour is come when I must leave this golden prison to go in search of the Truth.”

“ Will you let the world slip from your grasp,” asked Channa, “ to hold a beggar’s bowl ? ”

“ The kingdom that I seek,” was the answer, “ is greater than all the realms of earth. Bring me forth Kantaka.”

“ Thy father,” said Channa timidly, “ what of his grief ? ”

“ I go to save him also,” was the quiet reply. “ Bring me forth Kantaka.”

The man made no reply, but, entering the stable, saddled and bridled the snowy charger and led him quietly to the place where the prince awaited him. When the noble horse saw his master he neighed joyously, and then all had been discovered if the celestial messengers who hovered unseen over that quiet place during all this fateful night had not laid their downy wings upon the ears of the sleepers and kept the secret sure.

“ I go, Kantaka,” said the prince, softly caressing his charger, “ the farthest journey ever rider rode. Be fierce and bold and stay not though a thousand swords should bar the path. Outstrip the whirlwind’s flight, be fire and tempest ! Help me to help mankind—nay, more than mankind—all living creatures.”

Then the prince sprang lightly to the saddle, and though Kantaka’s hoofs rang loudly on the stones none heard him, for the celestial messengers plucked flowers of blood-red hue and sprinkled them before him ; and when he reached the triple gate the doors rolled noiselessly back, and a slumberous breeze

sprang up which wrapped the guards in heavy sleep. So the prince passed out from the palace of pleasure with Channa close at his charger's heels, rode some distance from the gateway, and then dismounting as the morning dawned, kissed Kantaka between the eyes. "Lead back my horse, Channa," he said, "and take with you these royal robes, for which I have no further use, my sword belt and the sword with which I sever here the long locks from my brow. Give them all to the king, and tell him that I will return when by service I have won the right and power to rule, when I am ready to save the world by casting away all that I call my own."

V

In the side of a mountain, away from the dwellings of men, but within sight and sound of the green town ruled by King Bimbisara, there was a cave whose entrance was gently guarded by the drooping boughs of a wild fig-tree ; and here Prince Siddartha made his home, dressed in the yellow robe of a mendicant, living on what he could beg from the charitable, sunk in silent meditation, and during the heat of the day sitting, with ankles crossed, so still that the shy squirrel would often leap upon his knee, the timid quail would lead her young between his feet, and the gentle doves peck at the rice grains in the wooden bowl beneath his hand.

He was known as a Rishi in the town beneath his retreat, and whenever he came into the streets

holding his begging-bowl before him, the people made haste to fill it, for they loved the mild expression of his countenance, and as he passed the mothers would command their little ones to stoop and kiss his feet, or to lift with reverence the hem of his robe to their smooth foreheads, or to do him some little kindly service, such as filling his jar or fetching him milk and cakes ; and the gentle maidens, gazing at his manly form, his uplifted head and princely carriage, would silently pray that the love of their hearts should be fixed upon one so noble and so good. So, unconsciously, without a word of speech but with all gentle quietness, he raised the hearts of men and women, and enriched their souls with heaven's own radiance. Then he would leave the town and go back to his cave, where, after a time, he was visited by holy men with whom he would discuss matters of life and death and judgment.

Half-way between his retreat and the town there was a colony of those men who use every art to torture their bodies in the hope of saving their souls. One day the prince visited one of these men and said to him, "My brother, why do you add to the pains of life which is in itself so painful? Tell me, for I am one who seeks the Truth."

"It is only by the torture of the flesh," was the reply, "that the soul gains power to live."

"It is a strange belief," said the prince, "to spoil the fair house in order to save its inmate." Then the ascetics cried out upon him, "This is our road of life, and we will tread it to the end though

all its stones were glowing coals. Tell us of a more excellent path if indeed you know of one. If not, leave us in such peace as we can win."

The prince passed sadly onward, but as he looked upon the flowers of the field holding up their bright faces to the sun, the waving palm-trees whispering of happy peace, and the mating birds nesting in their shade, he seemed to see a world of better things than self-inflicted torments. And as he stood in silent musing he saw slowly approaching him a number of goats and sheep coming down with the herdsmen as if to pasture on the plains. There was a ewe with twin lambs among the woolly flock, and the prince noticed that one little lamb had been hurt and limped bleeding behind its mother, which bleated piteously as if asking some kind heart for help. Then the prince raised the lamb in his arms and put it across his shoulders. "Peace, silly mother," he said in soothing tones, "I will bear your burden. Surely it is as good to ease one heart of grief as to sit in yonder caverns watching and thinking without seeking in some degree, however slight, to soften the sorrows of the world."

As he walked along with the little lamb across his shoulders, the prince asked the herdsmen why they were taking their flocks down into the valley before evening, which was the time for leading them to the folds. "We have been bidden, Master," they said, "to provide for the king a sacrifice of a hundred sheep and as many goats."

"I will go down with you to this ceremony,"

said the prince, and they were quite content, for they felt somehow that whatever this man should do at any time would be right and wise; and whenever they spoke to him they addressed him as Master, a name which his dignity and air of authority, along with his gentle courtesy, had earned for him among all men and women with whom he spoke.

Now when they came down to the bank of the river there met them a young woman whom the Master had seen some days before; for she had come to his cave with her little boy, who had been stung by a serpent, asking him to tell her of something which would cure the child; and he had told her to go and get black mustard-seed, but not to take it from any house in which there had been a death.

This woman now came forward asking the Master whether he remembered what had happened, and he at once smiled gently but sadly in recognition, asking her whether she had found the seed.

"I went from house to house and from hut to hut," she answered, "asking for the black mustard-seed, and there were many willing enough to give it, but when I asked whether Death had visited the house I found that his visits had been only too frequent—not a home but had been saddened by his call. So, again and again, while my boy grew colder and colder at my bosom, I gave back the seed, for I could not find a single house where none had died. So I left my child by the side of the

stream and came to you to ask where I might find the seed and yet find no death."

"Sister," said the Master gently, as one speaks in a house of death, "when you brought the child to me yesterday I knew him to be dead and beyond the recall even of thy great love; and I took this means of showing you how the whole world weeps with you. Learn that the grief which all hearts share grows less for one."

Then the Master went on his way with the herdsmen until at last they came to the gates of the city, where the guards stood aside when they saw the prince with the lamb across his shoulders; and as they passed through the crowded streets the people paused in their occupations to watch so strange a sight. "Who is this gracious lord," they asked, "with eyes so sweet and tender?" And others said that it was the holy man who lived in the cave upon the hill-side. But the Master walked onward, paying no heed to any of them. "Alas!" he said to himself, "for those sheep of mine who have no shepherd, wandering in the night with none to guide them!"

Meanwhile a messenger had gone on in advance to tell the king that a holy man was coming to the sacrifice bearing a lamb upon his shoulders. In a short time the Master reached the place where the priests were offering the sacrifice, while the blood of the innocent victims ran down from the smoking altar in a scarlet stream. The priest was just about to kill a goat when the Master stepped forward

and, with a quiet gesture of command, stopped him. He seemed so great and so full of divine authority that no one questioned his right to give commands, and when all looked at him in amazement and reverence he spoke to them of life which all can take so readily but which none have the power to bestow as a gift. Every creature, he said, loved its life and strove to keep it, even the meanest and poorest of the earth, and it was a foolish idea to think that any man could set right the wrong which his sins had worked by spilling the blood of innocent trustful animals such as the lamb which he had carried on his shoulders from the mountains. He spoke so gently and in such pleading tones that the priests found themselves unconsciously drawing their robes over their blood-stained hands, and the king came forward to the Master with a look of reverence to hear more clearly, and without missing a word, the wonderful discourse in which he pleaded for peace and goodwill henceforward between men and the living creatures which they could make to bow to their will. At last the priests in a frenzy of sorrow and repentance scattered the flaming embers from the altars and flung away the sacrificial knives ; and next day the king made a decree that the sacrifice should be no longer known among them, and that men should dwell in peace and amity with all the rest of living creatures.

The king now took pains to make the further acquaintance of the Master, and was astonished to learn that a man of royal birth should become a

hermit and live a life of such stern self-denial. "Your hands," he said, "were never meant to grow thin and transparent under the rigour of the fast, but to wield the sceptre of a world-wide empire. I have no son to follow me. Stay with me, teach my people wisdom, and when I die rule them in my place."

"I had all these powers in my hands," said Prince Siddartha, "and renounced them to seek the Truth, which indeed I am still seeking, and will seek though the door of Heaven should open and celestial beings beckon me within. My mission is to form and rule no earthly monarchy however great and wide, but the Kingdom of the Law. There is yet light to reach and truth to win, and I go hence to seek it. If I find it, however, I will surely return to you and repay you for your love and kindness."

So the Master passed onward, having found after six years' stay in that place only brief glimpses of the Truth and of the working of that Law by which all men must live.

VI

To the north-west of the Ganges valley lies a thorny waste broken with sandhills, and on the edge of it a fresh green wood through which flows a quiet stream dappled with blossoms of the lotus flower and full of glancing fish and tortoises. Near this river stood the village of Senani, a small place of humble huts roofed with grass, inhabited by peaceful

tillers of the soil who knew nothing of the ways of townsfolk.

Here Prince Siddartha made his home, living once more as a hermit, and so wrapped in meditation that he took no thought for the needs of the body ; and after a long course of self-denial and self-forgetfulness he fell one day into a deep swoon of exhaustion. He was found in this state by a shepherd boy, who made a bower of branches from a wild apple-tree to shade his face and head from the burning rays of the sun, and poured drops of warm milk upon his lips. Now as the boy performed these acts of charity he was astonished to see the simple shelter which he had woven become a lovely bower of living branches which burst forth into glowing blossoms closely interlaced. Revived by the shade and the refreshment, the Master awoke and graciously thanked the youth for his timely help. Then he asked for more milk, but the shepherd was unwilling to come nearer to the holy man who seemed so princely, and so far removed from him in rank and dignity. But the Master reassured him, saying that kindness such as he had shown was the great leveller and that he would be proud to drink from his shepherd's bottle.

On the next day a band of dancing girls passed by the retreat of the prince, the silver bells at their ankles chiming soft peals as they leapt lightly from ledge to ledge of the rocky pathway which led downward to the village. They were accompanied by a man who carried a stringed instrument known

as a sitar, and as they came he played a merry air to which one of the girls was singing. The song was one of pleasure, and one of the verses ran :

“ The string o’erstretched breaks, and the music
flies ;

The string o’erslack is dumb, and music dies ;

Tune us the sitar neither low nor high.”

The words reached the ears of the holy man, who in his humility was ready to learn a lesson even from this careless band. “ The foolish at times can teach the wise,” he said to himself ; “ it may be that I strain my string of life too much, and that in trying to save all men I shall only succeed in losing myself.”

Now the village of Senani was owned by a rich and kindly landowner, after whom the place had been named, and who with his beautiful wife was well known for his charity and condescension. He lived a life of quiet happiness clouded only by the fact that he had no son. For a long time his wife prayed to the gods for this inestimable gift, and at last, because she was so kind and gracious to the poor, and so well fitted to rear and instruct a boy and to lead him on from virtuous youth to vigorous manhood, a son was sent to her, and the joy of herself and her lord was almost beyond all bounds. She took the first opportunity of going to the woods to offer, according to the custom in which she had been reared, a thank-gift to the gods, which she carried in a dainty bowl upon her head, while her right arm encircled

the baby boy who nestled cosily to his mother's side, wrapped round by her delicate veil.

She sent a servant before her to sweep a path for her feet and to tie scarlet threads about the tree which stood near the shrine of the woodland god ; and as she drew near to the place she saw, to her surprise, the figure of Prince Siddartha sitting wrapt in contemplation with his ankles crossed and his hands upon his knees. She thought, of course, that this was surely the wood-god himself, and drawing near to the Master she bent and kissed the ground before him, asking him in humble tones to accept her gift of snow-white curds freshly made with milk as white as new-carved ivory.

The prince spoke not a single word, and when the mother had anointed his hands with attar of roses from a golden flask, he ate the refreshing curds and felt new life run through his veins.

“ Hath my gift found favour ? ” asked the mother in a trembling voice of touching sweetness, and when the prince smiled gently upon her she ventured to come nearer to him and half-shyly, but very proudly, held the child towards his hands. The prince gently moved the delicate veil from the little one, and, laying his hands upon its head, said very quietly but very solemnly, “ I am no god, but thy brother, O mother of a man. May his happiness and yours be long, and may the load of life press gently on him. For six years I have sought the light which lightens all men's darkness, and it dawned upon me, glorious and helpful, when your gracious gift brought back

the throbbing life into my veins. You shall teach me wisdom. Tell me, does life and love such as you possess prove sufficient for all your needs? Let me learn the lesson from the lips of a loving mother with her babe upon her breast."

"My heart is small," said the mother, "and its needs are few. A little rain which will fill the cup of the lily will scarce suffice to moisten the field. It is enough for me to feel secure in the love of my lord and to watch the smile of my child. My days are uneventful, as the busy world counts events, filled with the cares of my household, the reverent worship in the temple, the talk with friends, and all the quiet ways of virtue and of peace. As for my belief, I know that hatred breeds hate, friendliness makes faithful friends, and patience brings peace to the soul. As for our after-life, if 'Now' is so good, shall not 'Then' be good also, or even better? I know full well that life has sorrows to be borne, and, for myself, if my sweet child should die, I think my heart would break—indeed I hope it would, for then I might still clasp him to my bosom and await my Lord in whatever world receives faithful wives and tender mothers. As for Senani, if Death should call him, I would gladly mount the funeral pile and lay his head for the last time upon my lap. My life is glad, my Master, though I am no guide to others; and yet I do not forget others whose lot is not cast in pleasant places, and I do what I can—and so also does my lord—to relieve their woes and soften their afflictions by tender kindness."

“You teach those who would teach,” said the prince, “and are wiser than wisdom in your simplicity. You who have offered worship to me, unworthy as I am, are more deserving of my reverence. Peace go with you and comfort all your days. May I reach at length to the pure wisdom of the happy mother with her child upon her breast.”

“May it be so,” said the woman with heartfelt earnestness, as her eyes rested once more upon the child at her bosom, who, as if he knew his friend, without any instruction stretched out his hands to the prince, who stroked them gently as he rose to his feet. Then he took his way alone to a great and spreading tree, which was destined never to know the touch of decay in memory of the Law of Truth which the Master had learnt in its vicinity, and which was to be known in all after ages as the Tree of Wisdom. As he passed under its ample shade, the flowers sprang into life beneath his feet and the boughs bent down to weave a grateful shade above his head. From the river not far away came cool and gentle breezes laden with sweetest scents, and the beasts which had come down to drink by its margin—panthers, boars, and deer—raised their wondering eyes to look at the Master who had been led to the threshold of the highest wisdom by the aid of a mother and her child.

VII

Meanwhile King Suddhodana sorrowed greatly for the loss of his son, that prince upon whom all his

earthly hopes had been set ; and more sorrowful still was Yasodhara, who waylaid all travellers who visited the king's palace, eagerly questioning them as to whether in their wanderings they had met with Prince Siddartha.

One day in the spring-time she sat idly by the stream which flowed through her lovely garden. Her eyes were wet with tears, her cheeks were wasted with sorrow, and her lips were drawn with grief. Her beautiful tresses were hidden in the fashion of those women who mourn for the death of their husbands, and her dress was entirely lacking in those ornaments with which princesses deck themselves ; but in her listless fingers she held a girdle set thick with pearls which she had found on the floor of the prince's chamber on the morning after his flight. Near her played her little son Rahula, now seven years old, whose face and gestures gave her mingled joy and sorrow, for they continually reminded her of her absent lord. The boy was laughing light-heartedly, and throwing rice to feed the blue and purple fish which darted through the stream.

Now as the mother sat there, taking no pleasure in the beauty of the morning, some of the maidens of the court came to tell her that a company of merchants had just arrived at the south gate of the town, having travelled from the coast, where they had obtained rich merchandise of many kinds. " But they bring more than these things," said the maidens, their voices trembling with excitement, " for they say that they have seen Prince Siddartha face to face,

that he has become a great Teacher known throughout the world for his wisdom, and that he is on his way here—on his way here at last ! ”

Yasodhara rose to her feet. “ Call those men to me,” she said, “ and let them tell me all they know, and say that if their tale is true, I will fill their bosoms with such treasure as kings might envy.” Without loss of time the men were brought into the palace garden and conducted to the princess, who eagerly questioned them.

“ We have indeed seen the Master, Princess,” said one of them, “ and we have bowed before his feet, for he has learnt all Wisdom. He is well in health, as all are well who live the life of virtue which he preaches, and from town to town he goes with his message of Truth. And before the first rain falls he will be here.”

The princess thanked the merchants gracefully and gave them such gifts as their richest merchandise could not equal. “ But by what road does my lord come ? ” she asked, and the men were able to tell her so exactly that mounted messengers were sent out by the king to meet the prince and assure him of the eager welcome which awaited him. “ Tell him,” said the anxious monarch, whose sole idea of a happy succession had never left him, “ to come and claim his rightful place as the future sovereign of this realm.” But the message of the princess ran, “ Tell him that the mother of his boy Rahula longs to see his face and craves to share those treasures which he has found in his absence, that whether he

returns as prince or beggar she desires himself alone."

Now when the messengers came to the Master he was talking in earnest tones to a company of people who seemed to be entranced with the wonder of his words and the divine beauty of his face as he spoke; and in the strange joy of listening to that voice they forgot for a while the messages with which they had been entrusted. They gazed, as if spell-bound, upon the Master and hung upon his words, and while he spoke they had no thought of interrupting him. The king grew impatient at the delay, which seemed longer than it really was, and when one came to tell him that his envoys had not yet delivered their messages because of their reluctance to interrupt the Master, he sent his chief counsellor as his ambassador; and this wise man plucked tufts of tree-wool as he went and stopped his ears with them so that he might not be charmed from his duty by the wonder of the Master's teaching. In this way he was able to deliver, though with all courtesy and reverence, the messages sent by the king and the Princess Yasodhara.

"I will go," said the prince. "It is not only my duty but also my desire. Let the king and the princess know that I come without delay." This message was at once carried to the eager watchers, and hasty preparations were made to greet the prince in a manner worthy of his royal rank. But Yasodhara, eager to be the first to meet him, went in her litter to the gate of the city, from which she could see

far along the road which led to the southward ; and she saw a man approaching slowly, a yellow cloth cast over his shoulder in the fashion of the hermits. In his hand he carried an earthen bowl shaped like a melon, and as he came to each lowly hut by the roadside he asked and gratefully received the alms which are never refused by those who look for blessings, and who value the lessons of Truth and Virtue taught by the wandering teachers. But in spite of his mendicant's dress and habit, this man was of such a noble and lordly appearance, and moved with such an air of dignity and command, that those who gave him alms gazed upon his face and form as if he were divine, and some, when they had given their offering, felt a sudden shame creep over them at the smallness of their gifts, and hurried home to bring presents of greater value. Slowly the Master drew near to the place where the princess was waiting. Then the curtains of her litter were withdrawn, and with unveiled face she stepped down, her hands tightly clasped upon her breast, and fell sobbing upon his feet.

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But when the king heard how the prince had come, dressed like a mendicant and carrying the beggar's bowl in which he collected alms, his anger drove from his heart all love for his son. He rose from his seat, plucked angrily at his beard, and, entering the courtyard, mounted his war-horse with a frown upon his brow. Then, putting spurs to his

horse's flanks, he rode so swiftly through the streets of the town that the people wondered greatly, and had scarcely time to cry to each other, "It is the king, bow down before him!" In a few moments the angry monarch reached the place where the prince already sat with a crowd of attentive pupils around him. The Master rose to his feet and approaching the king sank down on one knee before him with a gesture at once both proud and humble.

The king's eyes softened as he looked at Siddartha, but in a short time his anger again rose uppermost, and he said, "Is this the end, then, of all our waiting and the result of our proffered welcome to a prince, that he steals into his kingdom dressed in the garments of a beggar, shorn and sandalled, begging alms of low-born people—he whose life in the palace of pleasure was like that of the gods in their celestial seats? You ought to have come dressed in accordance with your rank, surrounded by shining spears and riding amid the tramp of horse and foot. See, my soldiers camped in thousands on the road, and all my people waited with an eager welcome upon their lips to greet you at the city gates. Where have you lived through all these barren years while your father mourned for you as one worse than dead, and the princess lived as a widow, setting aside all the joy of life in her sorrow? Son! tell me, why is this?"

"My father," was the quiet answer, "it is the custom of my race."

"Thy race," said the king, "is royal, but in all its

glorious history there is no record of a deed like this."

"I speak not of mortal race," replied the prince, "but of invisible descent and spiritual kinship. For I am of the race of those who teach the ways of Truth and Virtue and to whom the glories of this earth are vain and empty. Through love for men they attain to power over the hearts of mortals, beside which the dominion of an earthly king depending upon force and terror is a foolish thing. But now, with all lowly love, let me tender to you a precious gift which I have brought from far away for your gracious acceptance, a treasure indeed beyond all earthly price."

"What treasure?" asked the king in great amazement.

Then the Master took him by the hand and led him through the lanes of wondering people, with Yasodhara walking with them step by step. And as they paced slowly along he told the monarch of the wonderful lessons he had learnt in his journeying, of what things make for peace and purity, of the noble Truths which hold all heavenly Wisdom as the shore encloses the sea. So they came at last into the porch of the palace, the king with a peaceful smile upon his face, his brow smoothed of its angry frown, his ears drinking in the gracious manly words of the Master, and his royal hand grasping the beggar's bowl.

So they entered together the Way of Peace; and when the Master's discourse at length was finished the king rose from his throne and, putting off his

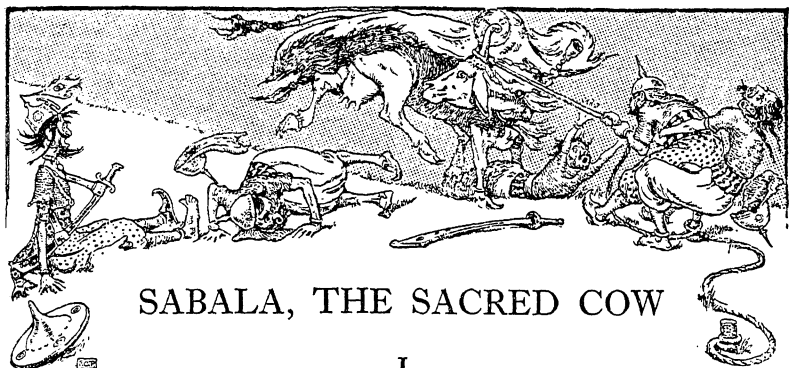
sandals, bowed low before his son, kissing the hem of his poor robe. "Take me, O son," he said, "to be the least and lowliest of all your disciples." And Yasodhara, with a heart overflowing with happiness, cried out as she held her boy before her, "Give to Rahula the Treasure of the Kingdom of thy Word as the richest inheritance that any prince could win."



STORY VII

SABALA, THE SACRED COW

A Tale of the Pearl of Ruminant Creatures



SABALA, THE SACRED COW

I

THE Elephant among Kings was, without a doubt, the monarch Visvamitra. He was of great height and haughtiness, and descended from the gods themselves. The neighbouring princes were all at heart afraid of him, and this secured peace for his kingdom and happiness for his people; but not for the king himself, who felt that the unbroken calm and prosperity of his reign somewhat resembled a continuous feast of *sandesa*, which, as you know, is made of curds and sugar, and is only suitable in its proper time and season. In a few words, the king longed for the excitement of war, and he began to wonder how he could obtain this stimulant.

Two things were necessary—an army to fight *with*, and another one to fight. As a rule the latter is more readily found than the former, but Visvamitra was very favourably situated with regard to the number of his followers, who were eagerly longing for a few battles. It was much more difficult to find an enemy, for the king was so prosperous and generous that every one professed the greatest friendship for him. When, therefore, all men

flocked to his banner, and no one set up an opposing standard, the disconsolate would-be victor was forced to set out on the march and look for an enemy.

Over hill and dale went the splendid army of horse and foot, archers and elephants, through the depths of dark and trackless forests, and by the walls of mighty cities, always on the look-out for adventures and the opportunity of making conquests which would render the name of their leader famous throughout the world. But no monsters or mortal foes presented themselves to be beaten, and adventures seemed purposely to avoid the warriors who sought for them with such assiduity.

In due time the king and his army came to the hermitage of the eminent saint named Vasishtha. It was a beautiful place in the heart of a forest, surrounded by kingly trees crowned with golden blossoms which spread out their topmost branches to make a delicious shade without darkness or obscurity, and to protect the place from tempestuous winds. Hermits flocked to this pleasant spot from all parts of India to listen to the wise words of Vasishtha and to sing the praises of his fascinating cow, Sabala, the white-skinned Pearl among Ruminant Creatures.

The hermit greeted the king with reverent courtesy, and paid him the great compliment of inviting him to be seated on the sacred grass. Then he brought him sweet roots and berries, as well as a vessel of water to wash the dust from his tired

feet. Having performed these hospitable ceremonies he proceeded to make respectful inquiries after the king's health and fortunes. The king, not to be outdone in courtesy, made inquiries after the matters which were of interest to the sage, asking whether his followers, his sacred fires, and his groves gave him entire satisfaction. The hermit assured his royal visitor that all was well with him, and begged him to become his guest for a season, promising to prepare for him and his fighting men such a banquet as would be worthy of the best of them.

Now the monarch, like many other visitors, found it easy enough to be polite and pleasant for a short time, but did not contemplate with ardour the prospect of a prolonged stay in the sacred grove, and an unvarying diet of sweet roots and berries. So he begged to be excused, saying, "O Bull among Anchorites, the sight of your exalted countenance is a feast of good things in itself, and the wise words which fall from your lips are as rain in the desert, or the shadow of a palm-tree in the noonday heat. But really, I must be going."

The sage, however, pressed Visvamitra to remain, and, unwilling to acquire a reputation for discourtesy, the king at last consented to stay, not without some qualms as to the nature of the food which would be set before him and his men.

"I shall be fed upon roots and berries, berries and roots," he said to himself in a doleful undertone, "and neither my men nor myself are accustomed to such a diet. We must, however, make the best of it,

and pretend to enjoy the simple fare which is set before us." The king then sent messengers throughout his army bidding the men refrain from any rude comment upon the nature of the entertainment which might be offered to them.

II

Meanwhile the eminent sage was engaged in a most important conversation with the Pearl among Ruminant Creatures, which had a great liking for being approached in a worthy manner and for those gems of speech which purchase favour. "My beauteous Sabala," said the sage, "my gentle, loving, and well-loved friend and benefactor, you are well aware how much we owe to the favour of great kings, and how by killing each other their fighting men make peaceful, shady, and cool groves for you and me. Now this monarch who deigns to visit us is filled with the cravings of hunger. Shall it be told of us hereafter that he left this hospitable hermitage with those cravings unsatisfied? O Light of my Eyes! will you not provide a feast, excellent in quality and overflowing in quantity, which will satisfy the appetites of this king and his fighting men, who, if report speaks truly, can eat at one meal sufficient to last myself or you for a year or even longer?"

Charmed with the soothing and flattering words, Sabala lovingly rubbed her cold nose against her master's cheek, and the sage knew that his request

was to be granted in rich abundance. Nor was he disappointed, for his eyes were soon satisfied with the sight of a profusion of honey, sugar-canes, mudki, and sandesa, as well as mountains of boiled rice, sweet pastry, cakes, jams, and all kinds of sweetmeats, to say nothing of delicious drinks distilled from the sweetest flowers, and whole rivers of curdled milk.

The soldiers of Visvamitra were delighted to behold so many good things, having expected nothing more than extra rations of roots and berries, and they feasted and rejoiced to their hearts' content. But, strange to say, the feast had the opposite effect upon the king, who began to think that things were not quite right when this poor recluse could command such a feast without any exertion on his own part, while a mighty king like himself would be obliged to put himself to a great deal of trouble and expense before he could obtain half as many good things. He began, indeed, to think that the holy man was, in a very real sense, guilty of treason.

So completely did this gloomy thought take possession of the king, that he refused to partake of any of the dainties, and upon being pressed to do so by the sage, he said :

“Hear me, holy man ! Your Sabala is, without question, a very Pearl among Ruminant Creatures, but I am not sure that she is really yours. As you know, being learned in the law, kings have a right to the *jewels* discovered in their realms, and on this account the wonderful cow is my own. I will not,

however, press this lawful claim of mine. Let me offer you, in all friendliness and sincerity, a hundred thousand cows in exchange for your immaculate Sabala."

"I will not exchange her for one hundred million cows," said the sage, without a moment's hesitation. "You may as reasonably expect to conclude a sordid bargain with the gods for the radiance of the sun, or to find a sage who would accept a worldly price for his wisdom."

The king's face grew dark with anger. "It is strange to me," said he, "how a sage who has acquired a world-wide reputation for plain living, and for doing without the things in which ordinary men take pleasure, should keep in his grove a creature which is able to provide so much food of the richest kind. The animal's power to do this must be at times a temptation to your saintliness, and it would be well if I could remove this snare from your path; in fact I should really become your benefactor."

"It is not needful," said the sage very wisely, "there is no credit in virtue which is not assaulted by temptation."

Foiled in his arguments, the angry king began to pace to and fro. "I will give you, then," he said, after a few moments, "fourteen thousand elephants, richly caparisoned, eight hundred chariots of ivory, each with four nimble coursers, and ten million cows with speckled coats as soft as silk. I advise you to accept my offer, for it is a custom among kings

to take by force what cannot be purchased for money.”

“Woe is me !” said the peaceful sage, now considerably disturbed by the anger of the king. “This Pearl among Ruminant Creatures is all my life. From her I obtain the offerings which I make to the gods, the pure butter which feeds the sacred fire, and the grain which I scatter on the ground, so that the fowls of the air shall know that in my grove lives one who, like Rama, is the Friend of Living Creatures. I cannot sell this great treasure of mine, O powerful King !”

The monarch rudely turned his back upon the sage, and in a loud voice commanded his young warriors to go in a body and make a captive of the Pearl among Ruminant Creatures. “Henceforth,” he said, “she shall minister to our royal wants.” His followers obeyed him with alacrity. “We shall feast each day,” they said, “without the trouble of seeking or preparing a banquet. By all means let us capture the immaculate Sabala.” This feat was performed without the necessity for exercising a great amount of warlike valour. But when the cow perceived that she was being dragged away from the hermitage she began to struggle and plunge, and to lash her tail with great violence from side to side.

“How have I lost the favour of my master ?” she said to herself. “Have I not always taken delight in his company, and supplied him with the food which the length of his prayers prevented him from obtaining for himself ? Have I ever murmured

at his commands or criticised the wisdom of his wise words? Why, then, does he abandon my meek gentleness to these ruffians?"

Maddened by the thought of leaving her peaceful home, she broke from the hands of the young warriors, and, with a bellow worthy of a bull, she ran wildly through the ranks of the army. The soldiers, of necessity, made a path for her, and came to the wise conclusion that it was rather unfair to rob the holy hermit of the animal which had provided them with such a succulent feast.

The immaculate cow ran to her master, and lying down at his feet she looked up into his face with beseeching eyes. "Have you abandoned me, my dear master?" she asked, while the tears trickled down her nose.

The unhappy sage wept in company with her, flinging his arms round her neck and embracing her like a sister. "You have always been a peaceful and attentive companion, never venturing to criticise the words of wisdom which fell from my mouth. I have no fault to find with you. But this king wishes to carry you off with him, and as his army is very large, I do not see how I can prevent him. Farewell, then, Light of my Eyes! I cannot hold out against an armed monarch."

III

At these words the cow rose to her feet and proudly tossed her head. "Have I ministered to

your wants for so long," she said, "that you have ceased to understand that I have more than mortal power? Has the daily miracle, like the rising of the sun, made you so familiar with the wonderful that its wonder is completely lost? Why, I can furnish you, after milking time, with an army twice as large as that of this ungrateful monarch!"

And sure enough the warriors duly appeared, and never had been seen in any kingdom an army so large, fierce, threatening, and impulsive. A fight took place at once, and in this contest the army of Visvamitra had no chance of victory; for as often as a man fell in Sabala's army another warrior rose up in his place, as fierce and well-equipped as the soldier who had fallen. After the unequal battle, however, when the warriors of the king had been almost entirely swept away, the new army disappeared as rapidly as it had sprung into existence.

The king was now in great grief, and his sons, of whom he had no less than one hundred, were filled with anger at the holy sage whose miracle-working cow had been the cause of their father's discomfiture. "We will punish him forthwith," they said, and with one accord they rushed upon him.

The sage awaited them with perfect composure, and when they were within a short distance blew at them with all his might. In a moment they were converted into ashes, which fell in a heap at his feet. The Pearl among Ruminant Creatures tossed her head in the air and bellowed with all her might.

But the king who had thought himself so mighty was puzzled at this evidence of a power which was so much greater than his own, and he sat for a time, looking straight before him, in an attitude of the deepest dejection. But he was a man of iron will, and it was not long before he had formed a plan, which he proceeded to act upon without loss of time.

He went home to his capital and placed the government in the hands of the only son who had survived the exercise of the miraculous powers of Sabala and her master, and then betook himself to the forest, where he lived the life of a hermit, and endeavoured by fasting and hardship to win from the gods the favour which he had seen bestowed upon the famous sage Vasishtha. When he had endured these severities for a sufficient length of time the great god Siva came in all his dazzling splendour to visit him, and asked him what gift he wished to have bestowed upon him. "Give me," said the king, "all the weapons in use among the divinities." At once his very comprehensive request was granted, and conscious of his power the happy monarch went off at full speed to the hermitage of Vasishtha. "I may find it wise to extirpate the stubborn hermit," he said to himself on the way, "but I will pardon the excellent Sabala, for this estimable creature must pass into my possession."

As he drew near to the hermitage, the king could not resist the temptation to test his new powers, and shot off one of his new arrows. It went hissing

through the forest with marvellous effect. The trees shook with fear, the birds of the air shrieked loudly, the deer crouched low in the brushwood, and all the holy hermits rushed for safety to the caves, crying, "This arrow is a prelude to a fight among the gods, and it behoves poor mortals like ourselves to seek cover." But Vasishtha displayed no uneasiness. He stood at the mouth of the cave with a smile of scorn upon his face, which angered the king more than armed resistance. "I will teach you, miserable hermit," he said, "to respect the Divine Right of Kings."

Thereupon he hurled at the sage a complete collection of the most potent and venomous darts which he had won from the armoury of the gods, such a shower of gleaming shafts as had never been launched at an enemy in the memory of man. But the sage, calmly holding his stick above his head, kept off the darts with perfect ease, his face still wearing the smile of quiet contempt, which he knew to be a more potent weapon than any dart in the king's wonderful assortment.

There remained, however, one powerful weapon in the hand of the surprised and angry king—the javelin of Brahma—and as a last resort he hurled it at his annoying opponent. As it was launched, the wind sank into silence, and all the hermits cried with one voice, "Farewell, Vasishtha, our master and our guide." But the excellent sage was even yet undisturbed, and his smile of contempt was only broken by the necessity for altering the shape of his mouth,

so that he could swallow the dart—which he did forthwith, making a wonderful meal of the wrath of the god. The immediate effect was terrible. His eyes grew as red as blood, scorching flames came from his mouth, and his wand glowed like a red-hot bar fresh from the furnace of the smith. Then all creatures, great and small, bowed down before the hermit, begging for mercy in voices of abject terror, and imploring the sage to lose no time in digesting the fire which possessed him.

The appeal was not without its effect. The sage took on his usual expression of quiet and somewhat contemptuous serenity, and the king paused to consider his position. "Evidently," he reasoned with himself, "the power of this sage excels all others. I will not rest until I have obtained it for myself."

Then without loss of time he flung away the weapons which he had acquired with such difficulty, and, betaking himself once more to the forest, began a life of the most rigorous mortification. After a long time Brahma himself deigned to visit him, and informed him that he had won for himself the title of Rishi among Kings. Even this did not satisfy the monarch that he would be in a position to conquer the sage, so he went on with his fasting and mortification, sparing no endeavour to inflict pain and suffering upon his body with the hope of strengthening his mental and spiritual power.

IV

Now there was living at this time a king whose name was Trisanku, and who was famous for his love of truth and justice as well as his wisdom in government. He had, however, an overweening love for his personal appearance, and the chief fear that haunted him was that it would be necessary some day for his handsome form to become old, to die and to decay. The very thought was unbearable to him, and he often spent hours in mourning his prospective loss. "These fine limbs," he would say, "these powerful hands, these eyes of fire, this manly bosom must all come to dust! Alas and alack! Have I not striven by assiduous exercise to make myself a perfect paragon of bodily beauty! Shall all this effort, too, come to nothing?"

In time this grief so took possession of the soul of the monarch that he set out to visit the sage Vasishtha and tell him of his great trouble. "Obtain for me, O excellent Brahman," he begged, "the power to take my beautiful body away with me when I depart from this world to take up my existence elsewhere."

"Foolish man," said the sage, "such a thing is neither possible nor desirable. Why, you ought rather to rejoice that you will one day be able to get rid of your very troublesome body which you have trained and perfected with such great effort."

The poor afflicted king was, however, inconsolable, and went off to ask counsel and help of other

hermits. But they only laughed at him, and, worse than that, they mocked at his handsome appearance, telling him that he, the handsome Trisanku, was, after all, no better than a handful of dust. Filled with haughty anger he turned away with mocking words, thinking that he was now well rid of them all. But his parting mockery had angered them, and they punished him by changing him into a Chandala, a person of the lowest caste. His glorious body became bent and twisted ; his eyes were now of the colour of copper, and his teeth green with decay ; his royal robes disappeared, and he found himself clothed in a single garment, the skin of a bear.

The unhappy king looked down at his new body. " In this guise," he said dolefully, " my own courtiers and my beloved queen will certainly not know me, and I may as well stay in the forest. I will pay a visit to King Visvamitra, who has won such fame by his mastery over his body."

He lost no time in doing so, and when the hermit monarch learnt who stood before him, he was full of sympathy and indignation. " The hermits who worked this ill upon you," he said, " are the sons of Vasishtha, and really the enormities of that family and their ill-natured cow are past all bearing. I will proclaim a sacrifice, and by the power of my fasting and penance will obtain from the gods the right to revenge myself upon this wretched crew."

This was done, and Visvamitra hurled his curse at the sons of Vasishtha with such dire effect that they were transported at once to the kingdom of

Yama, who rules the Dead. But when he made his sacrifice the gods took no notice, and would not deliver Trisanku from the body which he loathed. Thereupon Visvamitra resolved to do so himself, and in a loud voice commanded his friend to mount up to heaven with the body for which he had so great an affection.

At once Trisanku began to rise through the air, but when his head reached the sky the king of the gods hurled him down again, and he fell headlong. As he hung in mid-air, Visvamitra cried out, "Stop!" and he stopped, unable to rise or fall, and naturally filled full of the most complete terror. His royal friend was now so much puffed up with his own power that he began to mock at the gods, but his anger did not bring punishment upon him because he had won such respect by his hard life in the forest; and it was amicably arranged that the least troublesome plan would be to leave Trisanku among the stars, half-way between heaven and earth, where he soon came to be regarded as a constellation.

V

Again Visvamitra went on with his hard life, making himself suffer so cruelly that even the gods grew sorry for him and met together to consult how they could best persuade him to relax his severities and take some pleasure in life. "Let *me* try," said a beautiful goddess named Menaka, with a laugh like a refreshing shower in summer; and it was agreed that

she should go down to the retreat of Visvamitra and persuade him, if she could, to give up his hard mode of living.

So she went down, and the hermit-king took such pleasure in her beauty and grace and her merry laughter that he gave up the fasting and penance which had won fame for him all over the world. But he found after a time that laughter which never ceases can become as wearisome as woe, and he longed once more for the hard open-air life of the forest which had taught him so many of the secrets of nature, of the trees and birds, the animals, the stars of heaven, and the ways of the wind when it whispered or roared like ten thousand bulls. So he left the goddess to laugh alone and went back to the solitude of the mountains.

Here he lived more severely than ever, exposing his body to the most violent storms and tempests, fasting and praying, and learning more and more of the secrets of the earth and the heavens. So learned and powerful he became that the gods grew jealous and afraid of him, and appealed to Brahma to stop his progress to such stupendous power and knowledge as promised in time to rival or excel their own—a state of things which could not be endured for a moment, to say nothing of for ever. Then Brahma appeared in a vision to Visvamitra. “Cease your austerities,” said he, “and I will give you the title of Prince among Rishis.” The persistent king clasped his hands devoutly and said with all due reverence, “The title I desire is that of Saint

among Brahmans.” “That name cannot be yours,” said the god, “until you have acquired serenity and the peace of mind which covets the goods of no man.

“Have you cast out anger from your bosom? Do you bear a grudge against any one? Do you covet anything?” These words caused Visvamitra to hang his head in shame, and with good reason, for well he knew that his determined pursuit of power was merely followed in order that he might revenge himself upon Vasishtha, become his equal in all things, and finally gain possession of the Pearl among Ruminant Creatures. But, being a man of indomitable will, he determined to go on with his austerities and win all that could be won by their means, even if this meant that he would cheat his baser self of the prize which he had been so determined to obtain: which shows that he was a man of character and really worthy of the rich reward which he finally obtained.

Once again he began his self-discipline. With his arms held above his head, and standing on one foot, with no food except bitter roots, surrounded by five fierce furnaces in summer, and in winter exposed to torrents of rain, he stood patiently hoping to expel from his bosom the burning fire of hatred, jealousy, malice, and covetousness. The gods watched him uneasily, fearing for the power that such determination would surely win.

Then a radiant goddess, remembering how Menaka had succeeded for a time in shaking the

determination of the hermit-king, went down to earth in all her beauty and begged the man of inflexible will to give up his penance and self-punishment. But he grew very angry, and with burning words of hatred and scorn bade the lovely goddess begone. Then the wicked passion of anger caused him to grow suddenly weak, and he remembered with sorrow that even yet he was far from the serenity which Vasishtha showed. With a mournful heart he went away to a still more lonely place, where he sat down and for an interminable time remained as motionless as a rock.

Once more the gods were disturbed and called a council. "If this indefatigable man," they said, "is not given what he seeks, he will in time come among us as our master."

Then it was agreed that Brahma should once more visit the king, and suddenly he appeared before him in a blaze of light. "Your desire is granted," said the father of the gods; "henceforth you shall be known as a Saint among Brahmans."

Visvamitra bowed his head. "Then give to me in full measure," he said, "complete knowledge of all the holy writings, the knowledge of all Truth with the power to use it, the faithfulness which never swerves in the pursuit of Goodness, the Mercy and Tolerance which will lead me to see the best even in the worst, the Gratitude and Thankfulness which make twin streams in the Desert of Life, and the Serenity which is undisturbed except by fear of my own fall from grace."

All these things were granted to the victorious king who had found in his own Evil Passions an enemy worthy of his valour, and who now of course discovered that he had no longer any desire to possess the Pearl among Ruminant Creatures!



STORY VIII

SAKUNTALA AND DUSHYANTA

1 Tale of an Emperor, a Princess, and a Fatal Ring



SAKUNTALA AND DUSHYANTA

I

ONE day the Emperor Dushyanta went out in his chariot to hunt the antelope, armed with his bow and a golden quiver full of arrows made by his most skilful artificer, whose work was the pride of his heart and the admiration of all men. In due time the king's charioteer sighted a black antelope speeding through the forest and looking back from time to time at the car which followed him. On he went, springing and bounding lightly over the ground, and occasionally leaping high into the air as if to cheat the arrow which would soon be speeding from the bow of the king. The hunter waited until his chariot was wheeling along a level tract of ground and then deliberately fixed an arrow to his bowstring. At that moment the charioteer loosened the reins in order to give his master opportunity for aiming truly, but just as the arrow was ready to be launched, two hermits stepped out from a side path and advanced boldly towards the royal marksman, who at once ordered the charioteer to stop the car.

The two men came forward, one of them, who was plainly an elderly man, holding up his hands. "Hold,

my lord," he said, "and forbear to slay a poor fawn which has found in this grove a place of refuge for its timidity. Replace your arrow in the golden quiver, which ought to contain only those shafts that are forged for the punishment of the oppressor and the protection of the weak."

The king reverently saluted the hermits and in accordance with their request promptly replaced the arrow in his golden quiver. "Such an act of mercy," said the elder hermit, "is well worthy of you, most illustrious Prince. May you have the greatest of all blessings, a son distinguished for virtue and valour, fit to rule the world in peace. The younger hermit joined with his companion in praising the monarch's clemency, and Dushyanta bowed his acknowledgments in the gracious manner for which he was renowned.

"Great King," said the hermit, "I have come here with my favourite pupil to collect wood for a solemn sacrifice; and this forest on the banks of the Rahini is a place of refuge for the wild animals who are protected by Sakuntala. If you care to honour us with a visit, enter our grove, where you will be received with all honourable rites of hospitality, and will be able to observe the happiness of those whose sole wealth is their piety."

"Is your preceptor and leader, the renowned Canna, at home?" asked the king.

"Our master is at present on a visit to a distant place with the object of averting some calamity which threatens the life of Sakuntala; but he has directed

her, in his absence, to receive all guests with due honour."

"I will go at once," said Dushyanta, "to pay my respects to her."

"Be it so," said the hermit, bowing low in reverence before the young monarch, "and we will attend to our immediate business."

"Drive on the car," said the king, and the charioteer promptly obeyed his command.

"It is clear," said Dushyanta, "that we are now drawing near the dwelling-place of holy hermits. See how the grain lies scattered beneath those trees where the mother parrots have been feeding their young in the nests which hang from the branches. Look at the young fawns which, having learnt to trust man's kindness, and having become accustomed to the sound of his voice, frisk and gambol fearlessly without changing their course. The water of the river is here made ruddy with the consecrated bark which floats upon its surface. Mark also how the roots of the trees are bathed with the waters of holy pools which quiver as the breeze plays upon them; and the bright green of the tender foliage is obscured for a moment by the smoke which rises from offerings to the gods of clarified butter. See, too, how the young roes graze, without fear of our approach, on the smooth lawn before the garden of the sage, where the tops of the long grasses, cut off for some holy rite, lie sprinkled around. The perfect peace and sanctity of the place must not be disturbed or violated. Rein in your horses, for their martial

sound is not becoming to this holy grove, and I will descend."

The charioteer at once stopped the car, and Dushyanta stepped quickly to the ground. Then he suddenly remembered that he was dressed in a fashion too splendid for a visitor to such an abode of meekness ; so he took off his ornaments of gold and handed them to the charioteer. "Now," he said, "I can enter the hermits' grove, which must be a truly sacred place for my right arm throbs in an unmistakable manner." At that moment the king heard a gentle voice call out, "Come hither, my beloved companions," and turning to the right he saw through the trees a number of beautiful girls carrying water-pots of various sizes, from which they were evidently going to water the plants in the grove. As he looked, three girls of greater beauty than the others detached themselves from the rest and came quite near to Dushyanta, although they could not see him. From their greetings the monarch soon learnt that one of these maidens was Sakuntala, the daughter of Cana. "The venerable sage," he said to himself, "has little appreciation of his daughter's beauty when he dresses her in a mantle of woven bark and gives her the menial task of pouring water into the channels which surround the roots of the plants."

II

For a time the king stood in rapt admiration of the beauty of Sakuntala, who, as she went about her

work, was greatly pestered by a large bee which hovered round her head and would not be driven away. "This impudent insect will not rest," she said at last. "I will move away to another place. Away ! away ! Please drive it from me," she begged of her companions ; but they laughed and said in sport that King Dushyanta was the only person who could deliver her, as he was the appointed protector of their sacred groves. Hearing his own name, and unwilling to play the eavesdropper any longer, the king was about to step forward and disclose himself in his true character, but after a moment's consideration determined to appear as a simple stranger and claim the duties of hospitality. So he advanced towards Sakuntala with the customary courteous greeting, "Damsel, may this devotion prosper." The girl modestly cast her eyes upon the ground without speaking, but one of her companions roused her to a sense of her duty. "Go, Sakuntala," she said, "and bring from the cottage a basket of fruit and flowers, while from the river I will draw water to wash the feet of our guest."

"Sit down for a while on this bank of earth," said the third maiden, "and rest in the shade of this tree."

"I am obliged to you for the hospitable attentions which must have wearied you," said Dushyanta. "Will you not sit near me in the shade of the same tree ?"

The three girls responded to this courteous and respectful invitation, but after a while Sakuntala with-

drew herself and gave the king an opportunity of asking a few questions about her. He learnt from her companions that she was not the daughter of the hermit Canna, but that the famous prince Causica was her father, from whom the hermit took her when she was an infant. This information greatly pleased the king, for he was so charmed with the beauty, grace, and modesty of the maiden that he was already thinking of making her his queen. He continued to ask more questions concerning the life and future of Sakuntala, who, overhearing him at this moment, became suddenly offended, or seemed to be offended, by the talk about herself. The king therefore ceased his questioning and begged the two companions of the princess—for a princess of high lineage Sakuntala really was—to allow him to discharge his debt to them by giving them a ring which he wore on his finger. The two ladies expressed surprise to find the name of King Dushyanta engraved upon the ring, but the stranger explained that it had been presented to him by that monarch.

Just as he was about to take his leave the peace of the hermits' grove was rudely disturbed by the voices of a party of hunters bidding all who were within hearing to beware of the infuriated elephant which was laying the forest waste and was at that moment bearing down upon them. The three maidens gathered together like frightened fawns, and with trembling voices declared their intention of taking refuge in the hermits' cottage. So the king bade them a respectful farewell and went off to

rejoin the hunters, who were, as he knew, of his own party.

Before long he reached an open plain on the border of the forest, where the royal pavilions had been set up for the convenience of the hunting-party, and where he found the court jester pacing to and fro in real or pretended disgust at the nature of the sport which claimed the attention of his royal master.

“ Ah ! my friend,” said Dushyanta, “ you have not been privileged, as I have been, to see the brightest ornament of these woods.”

“ I presume you mean,” said the jester, who, according to custom, was allowed freedom of speech which was not permitted to the rest of the king’s servants, “ the lovely antelope which you set out to chase ? ”

“ I do not,” said the king, “ but a creature still more beautiful, namely the incomparable Sakuntala. I have seen her once, and I wish to see her again. Now, I command you to exercise your wit in order to find an excuse for me to visit her once more.”

At that moment the court chamberlain entered and said that two young hermits were without, asking the favour of an audience. This was granted at once, and two Brahmans entered, who saluted Dushyanta with great reverence. “ May I know the cause of this visit ? ” asked the king, and the two strangers then told him that certain monsters of the forest had dared to disturb their retreat, begged him to come at once in his chariot, and, during the absence

of Canna, to act as the ruler and protector of the sacred grove.

The king eagerly—*too* eagerly to please the mocking jester—consented to come to the hermits' retreat, and ordered his chariot to be prepared without delay. Then he set out with a light heart, to find that Sakuntala had spent the intervening period mourning for his absence, and that she had found out the real name and rank of the visitor to the hermits' grove. In a very short time the king and princess declared their love for each other and were united in marriage in accordance with the forest rites; but before they had been permitted to spend much time in the grove, the king was called away to his capital to perform the duties of his high office, and the people of the hermitage heard no more of him. This strange and cruel silence began to prey upon the mind of Sakuntala, and when Canna, her foster-father, returned to the grove, he determined to send her to the palace of King Dushyanta. The other women were soon pleasantly excited over the preparation of Sakuntala for the journey, but when they contemplated her poor dress of bark they began to weep without restraint. Such a simple thing, however, as the provision of a fitting wardrobe was not likely to trouble a magician like Canna, and when the ladies were weeping one of his pupils approached them with a profusion of rich apparel.

"Here is a complete dress for the queen," he said; "may she find good fortune in it, and may her life be long."

The young man was eagerly questioned by the women as to the manner in which he had obtained clothing so rich and beautiful. "Oh," said he, "my master simply gave the order, 'Bring fresh flowers for Sakuntala,' and suddenly the woodland fairies appeared, raising their delicate hands, which looked like the fresh leaves of early summer when the sun shines through them. And as they held their hands aloft, a delicate fabric, bright as moonshine, was woven as if by magic, and here it is. Other fairies brought ornaments—I cannot tell from whence—while others again provided the juice of lacsha to stain her feet exquisitely red." In a few moments the women were all chattering merrily as they dressed and decked Sakuntala in a manner worthy of her royal husband. Fresh exclamations of admiration broke from their lips as they examined one after another of the beautiful garments, and when their work was completed they stood away to admire from a fitting distance the lovely person of the new queen of Dushyanta.

The sage now appointed guides for his foster-child, and the ceremony of farewell was begun. Standing in the centre of the grove, Canna spoke to the sacred trees: "Hear, all ye trees of this hallowed forest, in which the woodland goddesses have their dwelling—hear and proclaim that Sakuntala is going to the palace of her wedded lord; she who drank not, however thirsty, before you were watered; she who pulled not one of your tender leaves for fear of desecration; she whose chief delight was in

your time of blossom." As he finished a chorus of woodland fairies broke out into a pretty song. "May her way be compassed about with prosperity. May favouring breezes sprinkle for her delight the dust of rich blossoms. May pools of crystal water, green with the leaves of the lotus, refresh her as she walks; and may shady branches be her protection from the scorching sunbeams." Sakuntala turned to leave the grove, but a gentle power detained her, impeding her footsteps by hanging on to the skirts of her robe. She looked down to find a tiny fawn which she had fed and tended since the death of its mother, and which seemed unwilling to leave the protection of the gentle princess. The sight of the pretty little creature brought tears to the eyes of Sakuntala, and she turned back to fondle it, as if uncertain whether she should leave the grove at all. But the sage rebuked her gently for her weakness, exhorted her to be firm and resolute in the course she had planned for herself; advised her to show due reverence to her husband when she should reach his palace; and turning away went slowly back to the hermits' grove. Sakuntala, with one last lingering look, passed away on her journey, attended by the guardians to whom Canna had entrusted her.

III

In the garden of King Dushyanta preparations were being made for a sacrifice, when the royal chamberlain approached the monarch and informed

him that a company of women under the guidance of two religious men had arrived at the palace from their hermitage in the Snowy Mountains, bringing a message from the world-famous sage, Canna. The king's interest was at once aroused, and, giving orders for the reverent reception of the party, he passed out to the sacrificial ceremony. But as he took his part in the rite he found his mind dwelling upon the probable purpose of the embassy from Canna, though, strange to say, no thought of Sakuntala seemed to enter into his mind. He appeared, indeed, not so much to have forgotten her as to be entirely oblivious of her existence either in the past or the present. "What message can the sage have sent to me?" he asked himself. "Has the devotion of his pupils been impeded by evil spirits? Has disaster descended upon the tender herds which graze in the hallowed forests?" But still no question arose in his mind as to the fortunes of Sakuntala. It was as if the memory of his marriage in the sacred grove had been erased from his mind by the waving of an enchanter's wand.

As soon as the ceremony was ended Dushyanta seated himself on his throne in the audience chamber, and the little company was ushered in, Sakuntala being supported by an elderly woman named Gautami, to whom she whispered, as she advanced towards the throne of the king, "I feel my right eye throb—what does this signify?" "May heaven avert the omen, my child," said the matron hastily, as she drew Sakuntala nearer to the king's

footstool and stood there with her in respectful silence.

“Ah,” said Dushyanta, looking at Sakuntala with appreciation of her beauty but without any light of recognition in his eyes. “Who is this beautiful damsel who appears among the hermits like a fresh green bud among faded and yellow leaves?”

“May Your Majesty prosper,” said the priest of the royal palace. “These visitors have a message to deliver from their spiritual guide. Let the King deign to hear it.”

“I am all attention,” said Dushyanta, and Sakuntala’s guide delivered his master’s message.

“The contract of marriage,” he said, “made between thee and my daughter Sakuntala, I confirm with all willingness and tender regard, for the gods have in this case united a bride and bridegroom with qualities equally transcendent. Receive her, therefore, in thy palace with all due honour as thy queen.”

The king heard the message and smiled pleasantly, but seemed like a man in a dream. The women gazed at him in wonder, and Gautami ventured to remind him of the sacred grove and his visit to the place when engaged in the hunt. “How strange an adventure!” he murmured gently and pleasantly, as if the matter concerned some one else, and then added, “Am I indeed this lady’s husband?”

Gautami now tried the effect of unveiling Sakuntala, but the king, though obviously impressed by her beauty, still made no sign of recognition. The guide of the party then ventured to ask him directly

what was the meaning of his strange silence, and Dushyanta replied :

“ Holy man, I have been searching my memory, but, to tell the truth, I have no recollection of my marriage with this lady. How then can I admit her to my palace as my queen ? ”

Then Sakuntala, moving forward with a piteous gesture which went to the heart of all who saw her, took up her own case. “ If thou sayest this, my husband,” she said, “ merely from want of recollection, I will restore thy memory by producing thy own ring with thy name engraved upon it.”

Then she looked down upon her finger and behold the ring was not there !

“ It must have dropped, my child,” said Gautami, “ when you lifted the water to pour on your head at the pool by the wayside on our journey hither.”

Dushyanta’s polite surprise changed to gentle scorn. “ Women are skilful,” he said, “ at finding ready excuses.”

Poor Sakuntala was now almost overcome. “ I will mention yet one more circumstance,” she said. “ One day in our grove you took water in your hand from the vase of lotus leaves.”

“ What then ? ” asked Dushyanta.

“ At that instant a little fawn which I had reared as my own child approached you, and you said gently, ‘ Drink thou first, gentle fawn.’ He would not drink from the hand of a stranger, but received water eagerly from mine, and you said, ‘ Thus every creature loves its own.’ ”

“By such honeyed falsehoods are snared the hearts and souls of weaklings,” said the king with contempt. Gautami ventured to remonstrate with him, but to no purpose, and Sakuntala, wounded to the soul, turned away in sorrow which was not appeased by the attempts of her friends to console her. The king remained firm in his refusal to admit that he was the husband of Sakuntala, but the royal priest, taking pity upon her distress, said that he would be glad to provide her, for a time, with a home in his own house where she might wait in the rather vain hope that the memory of the king would some day be restored to him. The king agreed to this, for he had no desire to appear unnecessarily unkind, and Sakuntala was led away, weeping bitterly, and calling upon the earth goddess to receive her and give her a place within her restful bosom—in other words, she wished with all her heart and soul that death would overtake her.

As she left the audience chamber Dushyanta stood in wonder and amazement. The beauty and distress of Sakuntala appealed strongly to him, but he was too honest to confess to a remembrance which he did not really feel. The little band of strangers had not been gone for a few moments when the royal priest re-entered the hall of audience in a state of great excitement. “Hear, O King,” he said, “and wonder at my tale! When Canna’s messengers had departed, Sakuntala, bewailing her ill-fortune, stretched out her arms and wept; when——”

“What then?” asked the king with great eagerness.

“A being of celestial radiance,” said the priest, “descended from heaven, caught Sakuntala hastily in her bosom, and disappeared with her.”

“It is, then, all a matter of sorcery, as I suspected,” said Dushyanta. “The affair is over. It is needless to reason further about it. Let no more be said.” Then he took his way to his inner apartment, but as he went he said to himself: “With the best will in the world, I cannot recollect any marriage with the daughter of the hermit. Yet so agitated is my heart that I am almost induced to believe her story.”

IV

Down the city street came three of the king’s officers leading a man with his hands bound. “Take that,” said one of them to the prisoner, striking him a blow of great severity, “and tell us where you got this ring on which the name of the king is engraved.”

“Spare me,” cried the trembling wretch; “I entreat your honours to spare me. I am not guilty of such a crime as you suspect.”

“I suppose,” said one of the officers in great scorn, “that the king gave you the ring as a reward for some distinguished service?”

“Hear me,” cried the man; “I am a poor fisherman, supporting his family by catching fish.”

“I should expect a fisherman to catch fish,” said the officer, with a scornful laugh.

“Blame me not, master,” said the poor fellow. “A man must follow the occupation of his fore-

fathers, and he who kills animals for sale may yet have a tender heart."

"Go on with greater speed," said the officer.

"One day, then," pursued the fisherman, "having caught a large fish, I cut it open and saw this bright ring in its stomach; but when I came to this city to offer it for sale I was apprehended by your honourable worships. Only in this way am I guilty of taking this ring. Will you now continue beating and bruising me to death?"

The officer smelt the ring and made a wry face. "It is certain," he said to his companions, "that this ring has been in the body of a fish. The case deserves consideration, and I will tell the story in the king's household."

"Go at once," said his two companions, "while we hold this cut-purse safely."

In a very short time the officer was seen approaching, and the other two tried to frighten their wretched prisoner by telling him what dreadful torments were undoubtedly in store for him.

"Let the prisoner——" cried the officer, as he drew near.

"Oh, I am a dead man," said the trembling fisherman.

"—be discharged," continued the officer. "Set him free at once. The king says he knows he is innocent, and that his story is true."

"Lucky for him," said the other two, as they unbound the cords which held the fisherman captive. "He was just now travelling at a quick rate to the

kingdom of Yama," he said, while the liberated man bowed humbly before the first officer, saying, "My lord, I owe my life to your kindness."

The man's mocking tone had now left him. "Rise, friend," he said with real respect, "and hear with delight that the king sends you a sum of money equal to the full value of the ring. It is a fortune to a man in your rank in life."

"I am overwhelmed," said the poor fisherman, with tears of joy in his eyes.

"This vagabond," said one of the other officers, "seems to have climbed to the back of a state elephant."

"I suppose the king has a great affection for this gem," said the third.

"Not for its money value," said the first, "but I guessed the cause of his delight when he saw it."

"What was that?" queried the others.

"Oh, it was clear that it recalled to his mind some person who has a place in his heart; for he seemed to be agitated beyond measure at the sight of the gem."

"You have given His Majesty great pleasure," said the second officer.

"Yes," broke in the third with a look of disgust, "and actually by means of this fish-catcher—pah!"

"Do not be angry," said the fisherman. "You shall have half of my money to buy wine."

"Oh, now thou art our best-beloved friend," said the first officer. "Let us go together to the vintner's."

V

Meanwhile the beautiful garden of the royal palace was lying bathed in sunshine, when suddenly a beautiful fairy maiden appeared in the air and looked down upon it. "Now I must visit this king," she said to herself, "seeing that I have attended to the safety of Sakuntala. Ah, now I behold him, but on this day which looks so brimful of happiness the king appears to be oppressed with some deep sorrow of heart. I will alight, conceal myself among these plants, and note what goes on without rendering myself visible."

Without further delay she floated lightly down to earth and took up her station on the spot which she had chosen. At that moment two pretty fairy maidens like herself, but lacking her air of authority, entered the garden, and noting a tree full of lovely blossoms lightly climbed up into its branches and began to gather the flowers, throwing some of them down upon the earth. As they were engaged in this pleasant task the royal chamberlain entered the garden and saw what the girls were doing. "Stop!" he cried, "do not gather flowers. There are to be no festivals this year, by the king's orders."

"Pardon us," said the maidens prettily, "we did not know of the king's desire."

"Foolish girls," said the old man, "and concerned only in your own folly. Why, even the trees which spring was decking and the birds which perch on them are full of sympathy for our mournful

monarch. See how the buds neglect to shed their dust ; how the flowers remain veiled in their closed cups ; how the voices of the birds are silent and their wings seem weary with their own weight."

" Ah," said the watchful fairy, " that sounds well. This king, at least, is not quite so forgetful as he thinks himself to be."

" A few days ago," said one of the girls to the old chamberlain, " a guest arrived to do homage to the king, and we came from Fairyland to deck his groves and gardens with emblems of delight. This is how we did not hear of his orders."

" Beware, then," said the chamberlain, " now that his commands are known to you."

" Certainly," replied the other girl, " but if it be permitted to us, tell us, we pray you, what has induced our sovereign to forbid the festivals of the spring ? "

" That is a good question," said the watching fairy to herself ; " it must be something weighty which prevents a king from holding a pleasing festival."

" Have you not heard," said the chamberlain, " of the disappearance of Sakuntala ? "

" We know her story," said the first girl, " up to the point when the fatal ring was miraculously discovered."

" There is little to add to that," said the chamberlain. " Undoubtedly the king's memory was restored by the sight of the gem, for when it was brought to him he said, ' Yes, indeed, Sakuntala is my wife, and when I cast her off I must have, for the moment, lost

my reason.' He showed strong marks of affliction and repentance, and from that moment he has abhorred the pleasures of life. No longer does he spend his days in making plans for the good of his people. His nights are sleepless, and when he rises from his restless couch he speaks like a man in a vision; and whenever his eyes fall upon the form of a woman he names her Sakuntala."

"This news is *very* pleasing to me," said the watching fairy, still to herself.

"Consequently," went on the chamberlain, "by reason of the king's affliction, the spring festival, usually so full of gaiety, has been prohibited for this year at least. But here comes our king himself. Damsels, conceal yourselves."

The two pretty maidens at once hid themselves in the tree while Dushyanta, dressed as a penitent and attended only by a single guard and the royal jester, walked slowly along the garden path.

"Ah," said the chamberlain, "even in his depth of grief the king does not forego his majesty. Our king is worn and weary; his golden bracelet falls loosened even down to his wrist; his eyes are dilated by sorrow and sleeplessness—yet I am dazzled by the light of virtue which proceeds from his noble countenance."

"I," said the fairy, "am very favourably impressed with the appearance of this young monarch."

The jester regarded his royal master with a sidelong look. "This is a case which passes all *my* wit," he murmured disconsolately.

“The fatal ring restored my memory,” said the king, half to himself and half to the jester. “What shall I do to obtain comfort?”

“The maiden skilled in painting is coming,” said the jester, “bringing with her the portrait of your beloved.”

The king and his attendants walked slowly into a leafy bower behind which the fairy had hidden herself. “This is well,” said she; “now I too shall behold the portrait of my beloved Sakuntala.”

Dushyanta seated himself and looked steadily at the fatal ring. “Tell me,” said the jester, “how the ring obtained a place on the finger of Sakuntala.” Then the king roused himself. “I gave it to her,” he said, “when I left the consecrated grove for my capital, and I said to her, ‘Repeat each day one of the three syllables engraved on this gem, and before you have spelt the name Dushyanta, one of my highest officers will attend you and lead you to my palace.’ Yet, in spite of this promise, I deserted her in my forgetfulness.”

“Now tell me,” said the jester, anxious to divert the mind of the king from its sorrow, “how this ring came to enter the mouth of a carp like a hook?”

“When my queen was lifting water to her mouth in one of the streams on the way hither, the ring must have dropped from her hands unseen.”

“It is very probable,” said the jester, trying not to yawn, for the sorrow of the king, which seemed to lead to nothing, was beginning to weary him. But the strain of the situation was at that moment relieved

by the appearance of a girl with a picture, which, after a lowly reverence, she held before the eyes of the king. He gazed upon the portrait with eyes blinded by unshed tears without speaking a word, while the hidden fairy said to herself, "In faith, 'tis an excellent piece of painting which seems to bring my lovely friend before my eyes."

"It is beautiful," said the young king, "but not so beautiful as the face and form which inspired it. Besides, a tear appears to trickle down the cheek of my queen, which does not seem to be fitting to her." Then the king gave directions to the painting-girl to bring her paints and sketch in a background which he described to her, showing the beautiful grove in which he had first seen Sakuntala.

After a while the picture was placed in the care of the jester, who took his way to the palace; but he had not been long gone when cries of distress reached the ears of the king. Then the old chamberlain came running in to report that an evil monster had suddenly descended upon the jester and had carried him off, picture and all. His piteous cries rent the air, and the king, throwing off his languor with a manly gesture, called aloud for his bow in a glad resounding voice of authority. In a moment a warder came up to him with a bow and quiver, and Dushyanta, taking them in his hands, made his way to the terrace of the palace, while the cries of distress seemed to be redoubled.

"Stand firm, my friend," cried the king as he drew his bowstring; "this arrow will distinguish thee

from the foe in spite of the magic which surrounds thee." At that moment, however, to the king's supreme astonishment, the jester himself came smiling towards him along the terrace. He was accompanied by a man in the dress of a charioteer, whose feet seemed to glide along the floor of the terrace without any apparent effort at walking. The stranger was instantly recognised by the king as the chariot-driver of Indra, the father of the gods and king of men, and he gave him respectful welcome.

VI

"O King," said the charioteer, "live long and conquer. I am sent to you by the ruler of the gods to give you a commission worthy of your youth and manhood. The gigantic race of the Daravas has for long assailed the gods with impunity, but it is written that, with your help, they will be prevented from doing so any longer. Mount the car of Indra with your bow and quiver and advance against them without further delay."

"I am greatly honoured by the gracious command," said the king, "but tell me, was it you who snatched up my friend here into the air and caused him to send forth such piteous cries?"

"Yes, indeed," said the charioteer with a smile. "I was desirous of rousing your spirits by making you thoroughly angry."

"My friend," said Dushyanta to the jester, "tell my chief minister on what errand I have gone."

“ I obey,” said the jester with a smile, adding somewhat ruefully, “ but I wish the affairs of great mortals could be settled without ruffling the feelings of lesser people who never did any harm to their lords and masters.”

We have not space to tell in detail of the glorious warfare which the brave king waged on behalf of Indra against the foes who had so long troubled his peace. His success against the giants gained for him the highest possible honours. Indra made the victorious monarch sit on half of his throne ; he perfumed his bosom with essence of sandal-wood ; and he threw over his neck a garland of flowers which had bloomed in the gardens of Paradise. Then the father of the gods and king of men gave instructions to a host of damsels to collect among the trees of life a large quantity of those crimson and azure dyes with which they used to tinge their lovely feet ; and using these as inks they wrote on the fleece of the clouds high-sounding verses in praise of the great deeds of Dushyanta. These wonderful inscriptions were seen by the king himself as he was driven through the clouds in the car of the god by the divine charioteer towards his own kingdom.

“ I see once more the habitation of men,” he said, as he looked downward, “ but it is yet so distant from us that the lowlands appear to be confounded with the highest mountains ; the lofty trees rear themselves aloft but seem to be mere leaflets ; the rivers look like bright lines but their waters cannot be distinguished ; at this moment, the great

earth sphere seems to be thrown upward towards us by some stupendous power."

The charioteer of Indra looked down with pleasure upon the fruitful garden of the world. "How delightful is the abode of men!" he cried in admiration.

"Tell me, Matali," said Dushyanta, "what mountain is that which, like an evening cloud, pours forth streams of refreshment and forms a zone of gold between the eastern and the western seas?"

"That is the mount of Hemacuta," said the charioteer, "where the god Casyapa dwells with his consort in holy retirement."

"I ought not to miss this opportunity of paying homage to them," said the king.

"The idea is excellent," rejoined the charioteer, as he brought the car to a stop without sound or jerk. "A little beyond that grove you see a pious Yogi, motionless as a pollarded tree, holding his bushy hair while he fixes his eyes steadily upon the sun. His body is half-concealed with the clay of an ant-heap; he is girded with the skin of a snake; his neck is wrapped round with twisted fibres; and his shoulders are almost concealed with birds' nests."

The two companions now approached the grove, which unfolded before their wondering eyes all the delights of the gardens of Paradise. The balmy air was full of fragrance from the trees of life; the water of the streams was dyed yellow with the golden dust of the lotus; the pebbles on the floors of the caves

of retirement were gems of purest ray ; and the attendant maidens were more beautiful than pen can describe.

The charioteer turned to his companion. " Rest here, O King," he said, " under the shade of this tree, while I announce your arrival to the ruler of this sacred grove." The king bowed assent, and as soon as his companion had left him felt his right arm throb with violence. " That would be an omen of coming joy," he said, " but joy has forsaken my life since Sakuntala passed out of it."

At that moment he heard a voice which seemed to be speaking in a scolding manner as if to a naughty child. " Rest yourself," it said ; " why do you give way so readily to violent temper ? "

The king cast his eyes around and saw at a distance a little boy with two female attendants. The child was forcibly pulling towards him a lion's cub and trying to prise open its mouth in order, as he said, " to count its teeth." The fearless action of such a mere infant roused the interest and admiration of Dushyanta, who found himself wishing that he had such a son of his own. How he would rejoice in his fearlessness !

" The lioness will get you," said one of the women, " if you do not let her little one go ! "

" Oh, I *am* afraid of her," said the boy with a mischievous smile. " Let me hide ; let me hide." Then he ran, laughing roguishly, behind the skirts of one of his nurses. But he did not release the lion's cub.

“Let the little prince of wild beasts go free,” said the woman, “and I will give you a prettier plaything.”

“Give it to me first,” said the child, stretching out his little hand, which Dushyanta regarded with great curiosity. “Why the very palm of his hand,” he said, “bears the marks of empire.”

“Words will not please him,” said the second attendant to the first. “Go to my cottage, where you will find a plaything made for the hermit’s child—an earthenware peacock richly painted.”

The first woman went away at once as the boy said quietly, “In the meantime I will play with the lion’s little son.”

VII

“I feel great affection for this wonderful child,” said Dushyanta, as he stood apart in the shadow of the tree. “How delighted must an affectionate father be when he soils his bosom with the dust from the clothing of the little one whom he clasps in manly affection!” At that moment the second attendant saw Dushyanta, and coming towards him begged him to release the lion’s cub. The king approached the child with a smile, and without touching him said :

“How can you break the rule of this sacred grove? Whichever of the hermits calls you son has surely taught you that all animals are sacred to kindness.”

Without a word of protest and with a wondering look at the stranger the boy at once set the cub free.

"I thank you," said his nurse to Dushyanta, "for your help; but the boy is not really the son of a hermit."

The king took the boy by the hand, and, as he did so, felt a sudden glow of tender affection pass through his frame. "Ah!" he said to himself, "what must a father feel at the touch of his child, when the hand of a stranger fills me with such a feeling!"

Meanwhile the nurse was gazing at the man and the boy with a look of the most profound wonder and surprise. "Why do you look at me in that manner?" said the king. "Who can disregard the wonderful resemblance between the child and yourself?" said the woman, "and whence comes it that the boy, usually so naughty, obeys your voice without a murmur?"

The king raised the child in his arms as he said to the woman, "If he is not the son of a hermit, what, then, is the name of his family?"

"His mother is a princess of highest rank, and not unconnected with the gods themselves."

"I am overjoyed," said Dushyanta, "and not in the least surprised, for the child has the mien and motions of a royal prince. May I ask who was the father of the child?"

"It is not permitted to me," said the attendant with sudden reserve, "to name a king who cruelly deserted his own queen."

"It is enough!" said Dushyanta, whose face broke into a smile of understanding.

At that moment the first attendant reappeared

with the toy in her hand. "See, little one," she said, "how beautiful is this!"

"Where is my mother?" said the boy, taking no notice of the plaything.

"How tenderly he loves Sakuntala!" said one of the women to the other.

"Sakuntala!" said Dushyanta to himself. "Then my queen is indeed his mother, and he is my own child too!"

"I shall love the peacock if it can run and fly, but not else," said the boy.

"See," said one of the women, "the child's amulet is not on his wrist."

"It dropped while he was playing with the cub," said Dushyanta. "I see it and will restore it to your hand."

"Do not touch it," said both the women hastily.

"Here it is," said the king, "but why would you have restrained me from touching this bright gem?"

"Sir," said the second attendant, "this amulet has a wonderful power, and when it was bestowed on the child at his birth, it was said that if it fell to the ground at any time, none but the father or mother of the boy could touch it unhurt."

"What if a stranger had picked it up?" asked the king.

"It would have become a serpent, and wounded him," said the attendant.

"Has this really happened to another?"

"Yes, indeed," said the women, both at once.

Dushyanta raised the boy in his arms and em-

braced him with great tenderness. "Good-bye," said the child prettily, as he frankly returned the king's caress. "I must return to my mother."

"My darling son," said the king, "let us make her happy by going to her together."

"King Dushyanta is my father," said the boy, "and you are not Dushyanta."

"His very denial of me delights me," said the happy monarch.

VIII

At that moment Sakuntala appeared, dressed in mourning apparel, with her long black hair twisted in a single braid and hanging down her back. As she moved slowly forward she said to herself in a quiet voice, "The amulet, they tell me, has proved its divine power."

"Ah," said Dushyanta, as he watched her approach. "How worn is her face, once so smooth and placid! How sad her demeanour, which was once so joyous and so free!"

Sakuntala raised her eyes, seeing and yet doubting. "Is that indeed my lord, grown pale with penitence and affliction?"

"Mother," said the boy, running hastily to the princess, "here is a stranger who calls me his son."

"My best beloved," said the king to his queen, as the lovely boy clung to the skirts of her robe, "I have treated you with great cruelty. I implore your remembrance and forgiveness."

“ I shall be overjoyed,” said the queen modestly, “ when the king’s anger against his servant shall have passed away.”

“ The memory of our meeting,” said Dushyanta, “ was obscured by the gloom of some wicked enchantment. But now that gloom has entirely passed away never to return.”

“ May the king be——,” was the reply, but the tender lips of the overwrought princess could not frame the word “ victorious,” which always concluded the royal greeting, and she burst into tears of joy.

“ My darling,” said the king, “ though the word of conquest trembles upon your lips, victory of the highest is mine indeed, for now I know that not even unkindness and forgetfulness has cast out your affection for me.”

“ What man is this, mother ? ” said the boy, tugging at the skirts of the princess ; but before she could answer him the king fell humbly at her feet imploring her again for forgiveness. To see the mighty monarch in such an attitude was too much for the weeping queen, and she begged him to rise. As he did so Sakuntala saw the fatal ring upon his finger. “ Ah,” she said, “ there is the cause of our misfortune.” “ Take it, my beloved,” said the king. “ Nay,” was the gentle but firm reply, “ I cannot trust it. Let it be worn by my lord henceforward.”

At that moment the charioteer of Indra entered the grove with a smile upon his face, as if he knew without information of the happy meeting of king and queen and prince. “ Was this fortunate event

previously known to the gods ? ” asked Dushyanta. “ What is unknown to the immortals ? ” was the quiet reply.

The charioteer now conducted them to the grove of Casyapa, who bestowed upon them the richest blessings, and sent them on their way with determination to rule their subjects with a single aim for their highest good.



STORY IX

THE GREAT DROUGHT

A Tale of a Thirsting Land and a Thirsting Life



THE GREAT DROUGHT

I

ONCE upon a time the land of the Angas was sorely afflicted by drought. The earth-goddess suffered greatly, and her anguish was shared by all living creatures ; the soil was too feeble to bring forth fruit or grass, so that the animals died, and men grew pale from hunger. The king of the Angas prayed earnestly for relief, and when no answer came to his prayers he flung himself in despair upon the ground, and cried to the god Vishnu, whose presence penetrates all things : "Life is too sorrowful ; let me die. My heart is so full of pity for my people, whose sunken eyes gaze upon me as upon the face of their father. How can I endure this agony of vain supplication and live ? All their sufferings seem to gather within my own breast. The weight of their misery bows me to the earth. If there be no help for me, call me back to the bosom of the gods whence I came."

Having made this most earnest supplication, the king rose from his knees and summoned his ministers and courtiers to meet all the Brahmans and holy men of the kingdom in a solemn council. When they

came together he said to them : " Can none of you suggest how this curse may be removed from the land ? If I cannot be of use to my people, I am determined to bring my life to an end, and that without further delay."

Then a holy Brahman stepped out from among the rest and stood before the king. He was famous for the purity and tranquillity of his life, and for his deep knowledge of the ways of Wisdom and Virtue.

" Hear me, O King," he said quietly. " In the depths of the forest lives a hermit whose name is Vibhandaka. Long, long ago he left this city with his heart filled with hatred against all mankind, because he had found in his dealings with them nothing but foolishness and wickedness. He had a deep scorn for all which goes by the name of pleasure, and beauty in all its forms and manifestations he utterly despised. He took with him into his forest retreat his infant son Rishyasringa, and, choosing a cave in the most desolate part of the forest, he settled down to bring up the boy in such a manner that he would never be disillusioned by experience.

" ' I give you, my child,' he said to the infant, ' the beasts of the forest to be your playfellows : from them you will learn less of cruelty and wickedness than from human beings. You will hear the shriek of the parrot, the howl of the jackal, the mowl of the lynx, and the screech of the hyena, but you will be spared the unnatural sound of the quarrelsome voices of men and women. Among the most repulsive reptiles and venomous insects you will live

in ignorance of the vile jealousies and angry passions of men. Exposed to the weather with its violent changes, attended at every step by a thousand dangers, living a life of hardship, affliction, and peril, you will live more peacefully and more securely than among the people of a busy city.'

"The father carried out his plan for training the boy as a recluse, and from childhood to youth Rishyasringa had heard no human voice, and looked upon no human face, except that of his father. The hermit is known far and near for his anger and for his rage against all the race of men and women; consequently, the hunter takes care to avoid his cave, and the other dwellers in the forest go a long way out of their path to keep away from it: even the prowling beasts of prey do not go near to the place, for the gods, approving of the severity of the hermit's life, have given him the evil and awful POWER TO CURSE.

"And now Rishyasringa has become a man: and in his life there is a drought as great as that which afflicts this unhappy land over which you rule, O King; for lacking the cheering presence of his fellow-men all kinds of generous and good qualities inherent in his noble nature droop, and are like to die, just as the kindly fruits of the soil in this stricken country cannot refresh the bodies of men, because the refreshing rain refuses to fall from the heavens. Yet this young man is destined by the gods to perform great deeds, and be the ancestor of a gallant race; and it has been granted to you, O King of men, to rescue the youth from the power of this angry

recluse. You shall fling open the doors of his heart, that his fellow-men may make it their home. You shall teach him how noble a thing it is to be a noble husband, by giving him the hand of the Princess Kanta, your daughter. To you shall be granted the honour of bringing forth this hero to the light of the world of men. And in return for this great service which you shall thereby render to mankind, the clouds will pour their treasures of rain over your kingdom, and your afflicted people will once more raise their heads."

As soon as the holy man had finished his speech the king rose from his throne and said, "Which of you will set out at once in search of the young hermit?"

There was a stir among the counsellors and ministers. "This is an honourable mission," they said one to another, "and it is fitting that so illustrious a person as yourself should carry it out." But no man came forward on his own account to say, "Send me, O King!"

At length, however, a kinsman of the king, and one of the most valiant men among the Angas, stepped forward and said, "Tell me, O holy Brahman, has this recluse really received the power to curse?"

"Yes," said the old man, "the gods undertook to grant him whatever he might ask, and he begged for this terrible gift."

The counsellors and ministers looked at one another in dismay, and silence fell upon the company.

The king looked round upon them with appealing eyes. "Is there none," he asked, "brave enough to come to the rescue of my fainting people?" No one answered, and the council was broken up.

A few days later, however, the king once more summoned his ministers and advisers to a council. "I have thought of a plan," he said, "by which we may bring the young hermit here, and yet avoid the terrible curse of his father." The courtiers were, by this time, somewhat ashamed of their cowardice and said, "We are your servants, O King, and at your command we are prepared, if necessary, to risk our lives, or even to incur the terrible curse of Vibhandaka." These words, however, were merely the words of empty courtesy, and they muttered under their breath, "Plague take him; is he going to ask us to set out upon this foolish mission again? How *can* the coming of this young hermit cause the rain to fall?"

"Listen to me," said the king. "This young man has spent all his life in the woods: he has seen only the animals, birds, and reptiles. As for mankind he is familiar with the face and form of his father alone, whom hatred and malice have transformed into a savage.

"How shall it be with Rishyasringa if he sees the face of a beautiful woman?"

"Fit me out, without delay, a spacious vessel. Plant it with trees and shrubs, mosses, flowers, and ferns, so that it may seem like a lovely island, and let the most beautiful maidens in my kingdom go on

board this vessel disguised as hermits. Then let the wind and the flowing stream convey these messengers to the place where the angry recluse holds the young hermit as a prisoner, and in the absence of the father let the maidens lure the young man on board the vessel. If I am not greatly mistaken, the ship will return to us with a willing captive. See that my commands are obeyed without delay, that the clouds may once again pour down their generous rains to rejoice the hearts of all my subjects."

When the ministers and counsellors heard the plan of the king they were delighted beyond all measure, and lost no time in following out his directions. Now that the task of fetching the young hermit had fallen upon other shoulders, they assured the king that it was of the highest importance that the directions of the aged Brahman should be followed to the letter.

So the lovely maidens embarked on a ship which had been fitted out in accordance with the king's instructions, and the wind and the floating river swiftly conveyed them, disguised as hermits, to the place of retreat of the recluse, who had received from the gods the terrible power to curse.

II

Now it happened that for some time before this the recluse had avoided, as much as possible, the society of his son. In his heart of hearts he knew that he was no fit companion for the young man, for

his temper was so dreadful, and the awful power which he had coveted and obtained was so ready to manifest itself that he frequently poured forth curses almost against his will—so that he had, in truth, become afraid of his own evil passions. To avoid making any mistake, which no power in heaven or earth could correct, he kept out of his son's way. It was his habit at early dawn to take his hermit's staff in his hand and go out alone into the woods : and he would wander about until the fever of anger was worn away, and his mind was more calm and tranquil. The young hermit was, therefore, often left alone for days together, and he felt very desolate indeed, for youth craves companionship as the thirsty soil longs for the refreshing rain.

One evening, when the young man was feeling sad beyond expression, he strolled out into the woodland paths in search of sweet roots and berries. It was that wonderful hour which marks the close of the Indian day, when the Spirit of Enchantment seems to hover over the earth, when colour is rarefied without being obscured, and the shapes of things are rendered ethereal without distortion or effacement.

The dreamy youth wandered onward beneath the stately plantain and the sweetly perfumed mango. Overhead he heard the twittering of the birds as they prepared to settle down side by side for the night under their tender canopy of leaves. On either side of the narrow path, which his father had made by angrily tearing away the undergrowth, he saw the

long grass and the feathery ferns transformed into fairy jungles by the tender golden light, and here and there the prickly cactus with its flaming blossoms intermingled with the snowy flowers of the jessamine. And as he walked onward, in spite of, or perhaps because of, all the beauty, he felt very sad indeed. All at once a shower of dates that fell upon him from a neighbouring palm-tree roused him from his sad reflections. Looking upward he saw, perched on the topmost bough, a squirrel which, when it caught his eye, wrapped its face in its bushy tail, while at the same time it peeped through the fringe of it with shy but curious, black, and beady eyes.

“Dear me,” it said, in the tone of one who is very penitent indeed, “I am really *very* sorry ; but the branch from which I sprang shook itself, and consequently the fruit fell. I can assure you that it really fell of itself. Do not visit upon me, for pity’s sake, any of your noble and reverend father’s curses.”

“Foolish little creature,” said the youth, with a smile of infinite sweetness and sadness. “I would rather bless you than curse you, if, indeed, I had the power to do so.”

The youth went onward, and a little farther away came upon a lovely gazelle, which stood in the shade of a fir-tree, while its large appealing eyes brimmed over with unshed tears. “Woe is me,” it said, “for my poor, harmless mate. Just because it crossed the path of the cruel hermit he slew it with a curse ! And I am left all alone ! ”

The heart of the youth was filled with pity, and,

going up to the graceful creature, he said, "I, too, am sad at heart. Let us weep together."

But as soon as the gazelle saw him approach, it started away in great alarm. "Do not be afraid of me," said the young man, "I would not harm you for worlds." "You are the son of the man who has the power to curse," was the answer. "Nay," said Rishyasringa, "you and I have one Father to whom we both owe the gift of life. We are brothers. Do not be afraid of me, I beseech you."

But with the words, "You are the son of the man who has the power to curse," the timid animal made a hasty escape into the depths of the darkening forest. Then with his eyes flowing with tears the unhappy young man flung up his arms in piteous petition to the powers of heaven.

"Why have I been sent into the world," he cried in bitter anguish, "and given feeling and a sense of right and wrong? The whole plan of Creation would be perfect but for my unhappy self. I see the marvellous power that binds all living creatures in sympathy and interchange of service, while I, and I alone, stand outside of its kindly influence.

"I have the power of song, but there is none to listen to my singing. I am strong with the strength of perfect health, but there is naught for me to conquer. I have skill of hand and power of brain, but there is no necessity for me to use these heaven-sent gifts. Thoughts which have wings flock to my mind like homing birds to the mother's nest, but there are none to share them. A love of the stars and

flowers and trees fills my heart with rapture, but what is love which begins and ends with self? I have desires unknown and unnamed, but they find nothing upon which they can be exercised. I starve for companionship and the love of my fellow-creatures."

III

Now even as he prayed with uplifted arms there came floating down to him upon the fragrant air a breath which grew into a whisper, a whisper that swelled into a song, a song that roused the drowsy birds in their nest filling them full of jealousy at its sweetness, and that woke the echoes from their sleep to give a sweet reply. Then to the wondering eyes of the young recluse there came tripping down the forest path a company of anchorites, such as he had never seen before, whose faces shone like the sun at noon-day, and whose forms, even in their uncouth disguise, seemed to be those of celestial beings.

Nearer and nearer they tripped and danced towards him, gems of the richest lustre shining from beneath their homely garments, silver anklets tinkling like the forest streams as they moved. The air seemed to surround them with sweetest fragrance, the trees showered delicate blossoms upon their heads, the flowers kissed their dancing feet, while the evening breezes played gently with the folds of their garments.

Rishyasringa looked with startled eyes at the

beautiful band ; then he sighed and trembled violently.

Right over against the young hermit the dancers paused. Their song ceased suddenly, and, forming a ring about the astonished youth, they looked steadfastly but smilingly into his face with their large, dreamy eyes.

Rishyasringa found himself smiling, almost against his will : but still he trembled.

“ Who are you ? ” they asked, and their voices were like bells of silver. “ Do you live alone in this desolate place ? Tell us your name, O beautiful youth, and why you live here, so far away from all the delights of dear companionship ? ”

The youth with difficulty found his voice. “ I am Rishyasringa,” he said, “ and this forest is the whole world to me. Rightly do you call it desolate—and yet in spite of that hateful description it is not really so dreadful—at least if you will stay with me, I will show you many things within its bounds which are full of loveliness. My home is near at hand. It is a cave in the hillside, but its walls are glistening with unmined silver, and tender creepers hang a delicate screen before its entrance. No ugly and venomous reptiles or beasts of prey dare to approach it. Not far away grow sweet roots and berries and luscious fruits, which I will gladly gather for your enjoyment. If you love the flowers they are to be had in the greatest profusion, and of the sweetest fragrance. The birds, too, are delightful for colour and shape and song. Oh, believe me, it is not

so desolate a place after all—at least, not if you stay with me to share my enjoyment in its delights.”

At his eager, breathless words the girls laughed merrily, and their laughter was like the purling of a brook over the pebbles in the leafy month of June. The young hermit laughed also, but he could not have told you why if you had asked him.

“Show us your home in a cave, gentle youth,” they said eagerly; and they gathered closely round him. Then he led them to the cavern in the rocky hillside and regaled them with sweet roots and berries and luscious fruits. But merry as they were, these lovely maidens were not without uneasiness. “If the recluse should return,” they said, “he would wither our youth and beauty with his powerful curse, and make us ugly!” So after a short time for rest they all sprang to their feet and said, “Farewell, Rishyasringa, and thank you for your hospitality.”

“Farewell?” cried the youth, “surely you will not leave me. O lovely strangers, I beseech you to stay with me.”

“And the old hermit—what of him?” they asked with fear in their voices. “Ah,” thought the young man, “my father would undoubtedly do them some injury.”

“You are right,” he said aloud. “It is better for you that you should go. Farewell!” and in deep sorrow he bowed his head upon his hands. “When they are gone, I shall die,” he murmured to himself.

“Nay, gentle youth,” said they, “surely we shall see you again. Will you not come and visit

us in *our* hermitage? Do you love our companionship so little that you do not even ask where we are to be found? You know little of the rites of hospitality."

The youth raised his head slowly and looked at the maidens, half in wonder and half in hope.

"I have seen," he said, "the bright stars rain down from heaven. For one brief moment there was light—afterwards the darkness was all the more intense and deep and blinding. It would be madness to seek to trace such stars."

"Nay, indeed," they said with merry smiles, "not if the stars lay gleaming at your feet. Our home is so near to yours that if you seek for ever so short a time you cannot fail to find it."

Thereupon they turned, and waving their hands to the young man in token of farewell, they passed out of the cavern.

IV

Now when the old recluse returned to the hermitage his son did not come forward to greet him: nor did he bring him water for his feet as he had been accustomed to do.

"What is this?" asked the hermit. "Of what are you thinking, Rishyasringa? Why do you sit there with folded hands and eyes of wistfulness? A youth brought up as you have been cannot surely be troubled with the feeling that mortals call love?"

"I had a dream," said the young man, slowly. "I dreamt that, being in the woods, I met a company

of young anchorites ; they were surely holy folk of most distinguished virtue, for their faces were as radiant as the noonday sun, and their forms seemed of more than mortal beauty. They entered this dark abode, and straightway it was filled with light. At their lightest touch the blood throbbed so quickly in my veins that I could have wept for pain, but when I looked into their faces the pain became a delight. At length they rose, and, waving their delicate hands to me, they said, "Farewell, Rishyasinga." They passed away, and all grew dark.

As he listened to the young man's story, the hermit's lip curled in bitter scorn. "Hear me," he said, in a harsh voice, "there are things which take the form of beauty, but are really manifestations of disease. There are forms of gracefulness which wear the garb of sunshine, but are inwardly as black as blackest night. These anchorites of yours were surely demons."

Thereupon the surly old hermit stretched himself upon the couch of leaves, and fell fast asleep.

But his son could not rest. "They were certainly not demons," he said to himself over and over again ; and early the next day, as soon as the recluse had left the cave, he started out to seek for the graceful strangers.

The birds were singing in the trees ; the flowers were sparkling with dew-drops ; the air was full of fragrance ; the tender green of the leaves tempered the glowing radiance of the sun—and yet he could not find those whom he had come to seek. He flung

himself down upon the grass. "They have forsaken me," he cried in bitter grief, "and nothing remains for me now but to die."

But this catastrophe was not destined to happen. He heard a rustling among the bushes, and all around him the air seemed to quiver with merriment; the roses shook as if with inward laughter, and their scented petals fell in tender showers upon the ground; the blades of grass seemed to tremble with pleasure; the tiny beetles, peeping out from their hiding-places, chuckled with delight, and from a bower of greenery sprang the young anchorites with dancing feet and smiling faces, singing as they came.

"Did you think we had forsaken you, Rishyasringa?" they cried in merry tones. "Yes, indeed," he replied, and then for some unknown reason began to laugh gently. The maidens joined in his happy laughter, and the echoes of the forest continued the sound until the air seemed to be full of joy. "Come with us," they cried. "Let us show you *our* hermitage;" and then, while some of them held his hands, and others sang and danced around him, they led him to the lovely vessel which was moored by the river bank.

And as he stepped on board, far away, over the land of the Angas, a fleecy cloud extended its downy, swan-like wings and the rain began to fall in refreshing showers upon the thirsty soil.

When the surly old hermit returned home that evening he found his cave deserted. "Rishyas-

ringa," he cried with impatience, but there was no answer to his call, and he ran out into the forest, repeating the cry again and again. But only the echoes gave an answer to his piteous cries.

Soon he met a man driving before him a herd of dappled cows of most unusual beauty. "Who is the owner of these wonderful animals?" he asked, surprised out of his anger by his admiration.

"They belong to Rishyasringa," was the herdsman's answer. The hermit made no reply, but went on his way with knitted brows, although at a slower pace.

After a while he met a troop of splendid elephants bearing ornaments of gold and ivory. "Who is the owner of these wonderful animals?" he asked, and this time he was not in the least surprised to receive the answer, "They belong to Rishyasringa."

The hermit put his hand to his head and stood in the middle of the road in a state of utter bewilderment. As he stood wondering a chariot, all inlaid with gems and drawn by four swift horses, came swiftly along the highway. "Who is the owner of this noble chariot?" he asked, and he was less surprised than ever to receive the answer, "It belongs to Rishyasringa. To-day the young man weds the beautiful Kanta, the daughter of the King of the Angas."

Thereupon the charioteer drove swiftly away and left the hermit standing there alone, and thinking very deeply.